

**THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN
FRANCE**

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THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN

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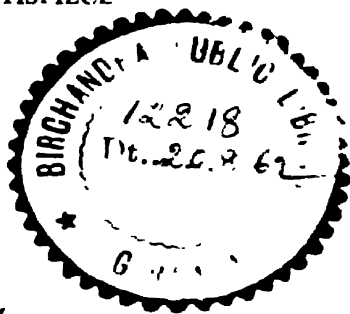
IN PREPARATION

The Middle East; Israel

THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN FRANCE

ALEXANDER REID

WITH A MAP
25 PHOTOGRAPHS
AND FRONTISPIECE



PHOENIX HOUSE LTD
LONDON

Made in Great Britain
Printed at Bristol by J. W. Arrowsmith Limited
for
PHOENIX HOUSE LIMITED
38 William IV Street, Charing Cross,
London, W.C.2

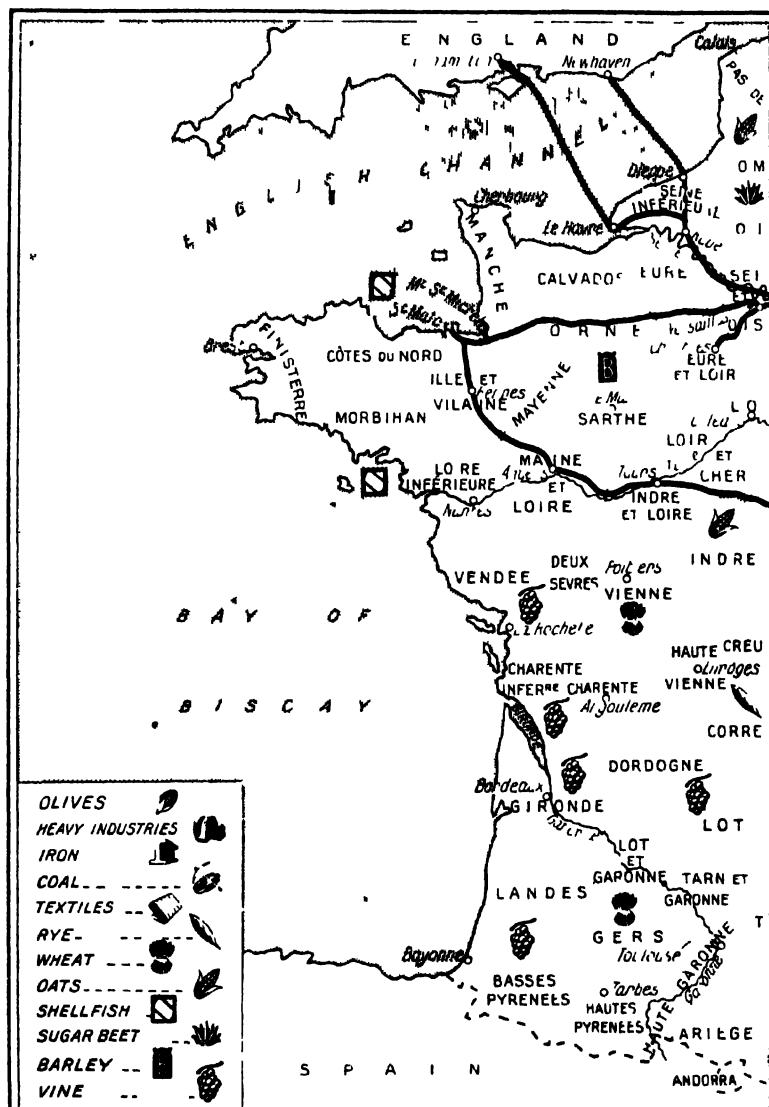
CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
1. An Exciting Arrival	11
2. Lost on L'Étoile	16
3. Paris under Snow	22
4. 'Upside Down'	29
5. The Valley of the Rhône	38
6. The Sea and the Hills	48
7. A Provençal Farm	56
8. The Unexpected River	61
9. In the Land of Flowers	67
10. On the Blue Coast	75
11. 'Straight out of <i>The Chocolate Soldier!</i> '	82
12. The Roaring Mountain	89
13. Glaciers and Goats	95
14. A Flight and a Fall	103
15. Yseult has an Idea	112
16. The Land of Milk and Honey	115
17. An SOS from a Spire	130
18. Pleasures and Palaces	139
19. Versailles and Away	145
Index and Pronunciations	153

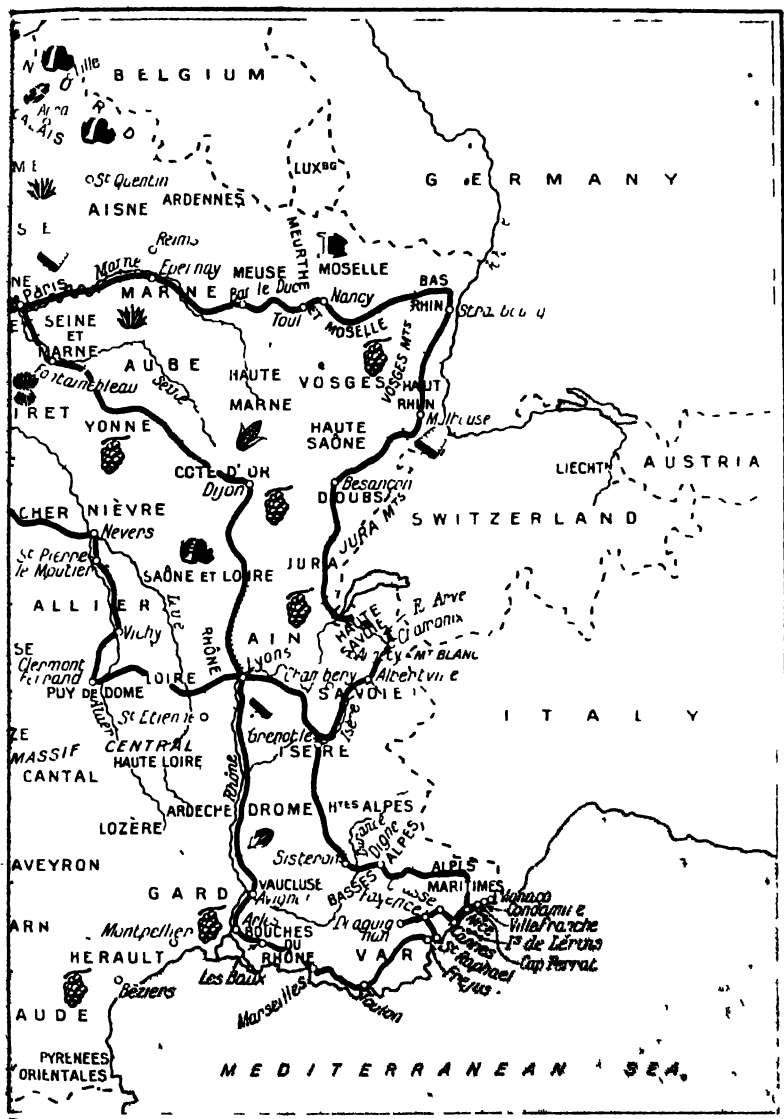
ILLUSTRATIONS

A needle of rock rising from Le Puy	<i>Frontispiece</i>
An old house in the rich Normandy farmlands	<i>Facing</i> 16
The very centre of Paris—the Place de la Concorde	17
The Arc de Triomphe, the largest stone arch in the world	17
Paris from the tower of Notre Dame	32
A corner of Montmartre	33
A lake in the Bois de Boulogne	33
The bridge at Avignon	48
Fishing vessels in the old Harbour at Marseilles	48
A typical village in Var	49
The Old Port of St Raphaël	49
A quiet corner of Cannes	64
Flowers for the perfume industry	65
In a scent factory	65
A narrow street of old Monaco	80
Part of the splendid coastline of Nice	81
The handsome town of Grenoble	96
The green island of St Honorat	96

	<i>Facing</i>
The Brévent Téléférique near Chamonix	97
An old bridge in Lyons	97
The island fortress-monastery of Mont Saint-Michel	112
One of the splendid old Châteaux of Touraine	112
Saint day in a Breton village	113
The rose-red cathedral of Strasbourg	128
The great ironworks at Longwy in Lorraine	129
Fountains playing in the gardens at Versailles	129



The thick black lines show the routes followed by all or some of the Robertson family, from their crossing from Newhaven until their arrival back in England



via Le Havre—from Dieppe to Paris, south to the 'Blue Coast', north-east the Alps, west to Brittany, and to Paris again.

A ma Belle-mère

Chapter 1

AN EXCITING ARRIVAL

As the gangway went clattering down from the ship's side to the dock, the wild-looking men who had been lounging by the woodpile near the railway line, unshaven, muffled against the cold in sheepskin jackets, old army overcoats, leather jerkins, and multiple layers of jerseys, came suddenly to life. Shouting and yelling like madmen, they dashed up the gangway, flung themselves on the pile of luggage in the ship's waist, and began to tear it to pieces.

'Pirates! David, it's the pirates!' cried an eight-year-old Scots boy standing with his brother near the head of the disembarkation queue. His shrill voice rose high above the shouting of the men and the rattle of the rusty mobile crane which had begun to peck inquisitively into the open hold behind them.

'Look, David, they're pinching the luggage!'

Some of the passengers in the queue turned round smiling, but David Robertson, who, since he had turned thirteen had begun (occasionally) to feel he had a dignity to preserve, looked embarrassed.

'Shut up, Leo!' he hissed at his brother. 'Everybody's looking at you. They're not pirates. They're only porters!'

'Well, I didn't mean they were real pirates', protested Leo. 'Anyway, Mother said the Normans used to be pirates, and Dieppe's in Normandy, isn't it?'

'Yes, but the Normans haven't been pirates for hundreds and hundreds of years. Mother was talking about the time when they first came to France and conquered this part of the country.'

But Leo refused entirely to give up his make-believe.

'Anyway, whether it was hundreds of years ago or not they still

look like pirates!' he said emphatically, and this time some of the other passengers laughed outright.

The crossing from New'aven had been a very stormy one. Most of the time they had been ploughing through heavy seas in a smothering blizzard; the voyage had taken a little over six hours instead of the usual four, and now, shivering on the snow-powdered deck, waiting to disembark, apparently forgotten by both ship and port officials, the people in the queue were delighted at any diversion.

'Il est gentil, cet enfant', said a slim French lady to her husband.

'And wise', replied the husband, a fat little man with a sad expression and a large cigar. 'All porters are bandits!'

'Hullo! Hullo! What's going on here?' inquired Mr Robertson, as he came up to join the queue with the boys' sister Jean and their mother. Jean, a year older than David, was not a good sailor and had had to go below for most of the voyage. She was still looking a little green and her thick brown hair hung in rat-tails.

'It's just our Leo, muddled again', explained David. 'He was frightened of the porters. He thought they were pirates!'

'I wasn't frightened', protested Leo. 'I *wanted* them to be pirates!' He gave up, sighing. How could he explain?

'Well, I'm not surprised at the mistake', chuckled Mr Robertson. 'Some of these chaps are wearing very queer rig-outs to-day. Look at that man in the fur cap and red jersey going down the gangway now. He might be a character out of a book by Ballantyne!'

'An *Old Fur Trader*, I suppose you mean?' suggested David slyly, then turned to his sister. 'How are you feeling now, Jean? Any better?'

'Yes, much. I wasn't really sick, you know', said Jean, taking deep breaths of the cold sharp air and practising her French on the shop-signs on the street beyond the quay. '*Boulangier*—that's baker. Then there's *Épicier*—grocer, a *Café-Tabac* and oh, David, look! That old lady going into the shop over there's wearing *sabots*! Goodness! Isn't it *foreign*?'

'That's the best of arriving at Dieppe', said Mr Robertson. 'It strikes the French note right away—colour and dilapidation!'

AN EXCITING ARRIVAL

He waited expectantly for his wife to come to the defence of her native country and Mrs Robertson at once rose to the bait.

'You're giving the children wrong ideas about France already', she said, reproachfully. 'Don't you listen to him, Jean!'

'I'm not', said Jean. 'I think it's lovely. Those red roofs showing through the snow, the coloured plaster walls of the houses, the balconies and shutters—it's just like a painting. I wish I had time to sketch it.'

'As a matter of fact it has been painted quite often', said Mrs Robertson. 'Of course it's even prettier in summer when the sea is a deep blue, the sun really bright, and the shops have their coloured sun-awnings down. Dieppe was a favourite resort of both French and English painters at one time. Not, of course,' she added hurriedly, 'that all Dieppe is like the harbour-front! The modern part of the town where the Casino and bathing *plage* are is quite luxurious.'

'I think we're going to land now', said David.

Sure enough the barrier separating the passengers from the gangway was being lifted, and soon it was the Robertsons' turn to descend to the dock. David went first, making a great clatter on the iron plating.

'Good heavens! What's the matter with David's feet?' exclaimed his father in alarm.

Mrs Robertson sighed.

'Didn't you know', she said, 'that when David heard we might be going to the Alps he put climbing-nails into all his shoes? I only discovered it just before we left and it was too late to do anything about it then.'

'Oh well, I suppose it will make them last longer', said Mr Robertson.

'We'll have to get him something else to wear when he's walking on my mother's parquet floors in Paris!' said Mrs Robertson.

The Customs House at Dieppe stands between two railway platforms along the quay to the right of the disembarkation point. In summer, when the steamers are crowded with tourists, travellers have often to queue here for a long time before they get attention. But on that stormy day only a handful of people had dared the sea crossing. Within twenty minutes of leaving the ship, with

their luggage examined and 'cleared' by a waggish little man with a huge walrus moustache (who looked exactly like the figure on an advertisement for a popular brand of French cigarettes, plastered on every other hoarding) with their passports inspected, stamped, and all formalities completed, the Robertsons were seated in the dining-car of the Dieppe-Paris boat train eating roast veal, string beans, and mushrooms, and delicious crusty French bread, with white wine for Mr and Mrs Robertson and cider and what Leo called 'wishy-washer' (Vichy water) for the children. About them was a babble of voices in French and English and a haze of pungent tobacco smoke, and past the wide windows of the dining-car, as the train hurtled through the falling dusk towards Paris, streamed the rich farmlands of Normandy, a land of orchards and meadows, of picturesque little villages with thatch-roofed houses and beautiful old churches, a land of plumed poplar-trees and slow meandering streams, but now all covered under the uniform white of the snow.

'And amn't I sleepy', yawned Jean as they returned down the corridor to the carriage where their hand luggage was and which they were sharing with a French lady dressed all in black. With her was a little girl of six or seven in a grey squirrel coat, who was leaning against her mother, fast asleep.

'You should try to have a rest too, dear', said Mrs Robertson to Jean. 'It'll be several hours before we reach Paris and it's too dark to see anything now.'

'I can hardly keep *my* eyes open', yawned David, settling down in a corner. 'It must be the heat after the boat.'

'Or the cider', said Mr Robertson. 'Look, Leo's off already.'

Leo opened one eye, about to protest, but it was too much of an effort. He let it shut again.

'Do you mind if I put his feet up on the seat?' Mrs Robertson asked the French lady.

'But of course not!' said the lady. '*Le pauvre petit*. But you all look tired. You have come from London, Madame?'

'Much further', replied Mrs Robertson. 'We've been travelling continuously since yesterday afternoon. We come from Edinburgh in Scotland.'

'*Mon Dieu!* That is a long way. And you are going to Paris?'

AN EXCITING ARRIVAL

'Yes, we are going to stay with my mother for a few days before travelling down to the Midi—to my cousin's farm up in the hills above Fréjus.'

'Ah, that is the place to be at this time of the year!' exclaimed the lady, throwing up her hands and rolling her eyes. 'There is no place like the Midi! Only to think, here we are shivering in these horrible snows under a sky with no more colour in it than a wet newspaper and down there on the Riviera the gardens are full of orange blossom and the mad foreigners—pardon, Monsieur!—are swimming in the sea! This is the first time your children have been to France, Madame?' T

'Yes, the very first. We didn't like to travel so far when the children were small. My husband and I came over last year but only to Paris. Now we are going to have a real holiday and see as much as possible. We'll stay in the south until the weather is warmer and then we'll go north to the Vosges by way of the Alps. A school friend of mine, whom I have not seen for many years, keeps a hotel there.'

'C'est un grand tour', said the lady.

'Yes, it is a great adventure for us—especially the children. But since they are half French I feel they ought to know something of my country, and as my husband is a writer and can do his work anywhere we thought. . . .' But after this Jean, who had been growing sleepier and sleepier, heard no more and the next thing she knew she was being helped out of the train and kissed on both cheeks by her grandmother, Madame Draguille, and another lady who looked like a somewhat weather-beaten version of Marianne, the lady who is to France what Britannia is to Britain. Then followed the confusion of the crowded station, a dazzle of lights on a snow-covered square, a taxi-cab smelling of cigars and violets, a vision of a long avenue of black wintry trees, the palace-like façades of strange buildings, the hooting and piping of innumerable motor-horns, the opening of great wrought-iron gates, the stumbling only half-conscious across a snowy courtyard, lighted from the windows of the flats around, a dizzy upward flight for seven storeys in a tiny lift no larger than a telephone cabinet, warm drinks tasting of raspberry and then, seemingly with no transition of washing or undressing, a warm and very soft bed.

Chapter 2

LOST ON L'ÉTOILE

WUMPH!

Jean woke with a start and lay for a moment staring wildly around the high-ceilinged room with its enormous walnut wardrobe, its neat dressing-table, and tapestry-backed chairs; then, remembering where she was, sprang out of bed and flung open first the curtains, then the tall french windows, letting in a dazzle of reflected sunlight from the snowy roof-slope across the court. Above a bristle of chimney-pots the sky was clear blue without a cloud, and despite the snow it was not at all cold for there was no wind. Leaning out of the window, her hands buried in the snow on the balustrade of the tiny balcony, Jean peered down seven dizzy storeys into the shadowy well of the courtyard where the small black figure of the *concierger*, or caretaker, was busy with a sweeping-brush. She drew back with a gasp as with another *wumph!* a second avalanche of snow went showering down past the window, and was amazed when next she looked out to see David, his arms full of what looked like fat brown walking-sticks, emerging from the archway by which the court communicated with the street. It was too good a chance to let slip. Grabbing some snow from the sill, she squeezed it into a ball, and heaved it down at him. By the queerest luck she scored a direct hit, eliciting an indignant yell from her brother, who, much handicapped by his strange bundle, slung another snowball back at the window but without of course getting anywhere near it.

Jean laughed and jumped into some clothes. She had just finished lacing her shoes when the doorbell rang. She had been so quick she was quite sure it could not be David, but it was David all the same, and she had no sooner turned the latch than

the door was pushed open and a large handful of snow thrust down the neck of her jumper.

'Oh David, you beast!' she cried, shaking out as much as she could. 'Now I'll have to change. You are a brute!'

'That'll teach you to snowball me,' grinned David and began to gather the baguettes of bread which had fallen in the struggle, and now lay scattered about the hallway.

'How did you get up so quickly?' asked Jean helping him. 'I wasn't a moment dressing. I felt sure it couldn't be you.'

'I came up in the lift, of course', said David. 'It just shoots up, and it's quite easy to work. But I say, do you know what I saw?'

'Snow!' said Jean.

'Don't be funny! The Arc de Triomphe! It's just round the corner.'

'Honest? I knew it was near Grandmother's house but I didn't think it was that near. I say, I must see it!'

'Wait till I dump this bread in the kitchen then and we'll both go', suggested David. 'Nobody seems to be up, but ourselves and Cécile—it was Cécile who woke me—and I don't suppose they'll be having breakfast for hours'.

'Righto', agreed Jean, and grabbing her overcoat and scarf from the hallstand, followed David to the kitchen, where Cécile was busy grinding coffee beans in preparation for breakfast. Cécile was technically Madame Draguille's household help but in fact more like one of the family. She had come to Paris from a farm in Auvergne when she was eighteen to be a maid in the Draguille household, and though she was now nearer fifty, and married to a butcher who sold meat in the city markets, she still 'came in' to give Madame Draguille a hand—or rather to direct operations—where there was any special entertaining to be done. It was she who had come with Madame Draguille to meet the train. Now, standing in the kitchen, one hand on the coffee grinder, the other flourishing a large spoon, she looked, despite a nose distinctly snub, more like Marianne than ever!

'*Mon dieu!* So you are up, too!' she exclaimed when she saw Jean. 'Do you not sleep at all up at the North Pole where you come from? Ah!' seeing David with the loaves, 'so you managed it? They understood you at the baker's?'

THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN FRANCE

'Pretty well', said David, putting the bread down on the dresser top, 'I'm beginning to think my French isn't as bad as it's made out to be.'

'Actually, his grammar's terrible', said Jean, who spoke French almost perfectly. 'Though not, of course', she added fairly, 'quite as bad as Daddy's.'

Cécile shut her eyes. 'Ah, *votre père*. He speaks French like a Spanish cow! When first he came here I could not understand one word he said and he had to make the design—what you call sketch—whenever he wanted anything! But you have your overcoat on, Mademoiselle Jean? Are you cold?'

'Oh no', said Jean. 'It's quite warm really. We're going out.'

'We want to have a look at the Arc de Triomphe', explained David.

'Before your breakfast? Are you mad?'

'Oh, we won't be ten minutes. We'll just take a dekho and come right back.'

'Well, take care you don't get lost!' warned Cécile. 'I think I hear Madame rising now and breakfast waits for no one when I'm in this kitchen!'

'We won't be long', promised David, and a moment later he and Jean were shooting down in the lift, crossing the snowy courtyard, and passing out into the street through a sort of tunnel at the end of which were the heavy iron gates which had opened so magically the previous evening. As David and Jean approached them they swung open once more, again seemingly without human agency.

'How's it done?' asked Jean, mystified.

'Didn't you see the window in the passage?' said David. 'That's the *concierge's* house. His wife must have seen us passing. The gates are worked by electricity and all they have to do to open them is press a button.'

'But what if you come home in the middle of the night and the *concierge* is asleep?' asked Jean.

'Then you keep ringing the bell at the entrance to the block until he wakes up', grinned David. 'You've got to shout your name before he lets you in though. It's no joke being a burglar in Paris!'

'It's no joke being a *concierge* either!' said Jean.

Beyond the gates they found themselves in a narrow curving street, walled in by six- and seven-storey buildings, some blocks of flats, others offices, and further down a number of shops—a dressmaking establishment; an ironmonger's store with its window full of aluminium ware; a dairy, which also sold wine and spirits; and others. Though it was Sunday all the food shops were open and there was a great scraping of iron on stone as the merchants cleared the snow from before their doorways.

'The breadshop's down that way', said David, pointing to the left. 'It's not like our bakers' shops. They just sell bread and rolls—nothing else. The Arc's up to the right.'

'Up to the right' took them through another narrow street similar to that in which the house was situated, and so out on a broad avenue bordered by lines of plane-trees, now tufted only with snow-blossoms, and at the top of this avenue, canting away at an angle because of the steepness of the slope, they could see the famous monument.

'Are you sure that's *the* Arc?' asked Jean, eyeing it dubiously.

'Of course it is', said David. 'There can't be two of them so close together. Come on. We'd better hurry!'

The Arc de Triomphe, the most-visited monument and the largest stone arch in the world, is 167 feet high, 147 feet wide, and 73 feet deep, and stands in the centre of a huge open space called L'Étoile, one of the main road and tube railway junctions of Paris. L'Étoile is French for The Star. Twelve great avenues converge there like spokes of a giant wheel and even at this early hour it was crowded with traffic. Pedestrians, well wrapped up against the cold, hurried along the broad pavements: gangs of workmen, including Jean and David noticed, a number of negroes, shovelled snow at crossings: taxis and private cars raced up the avenues and drew up hooting at corners: heavy green buses, single-decked and with open platforms at the rear, splashed through the melting slush, bells jangling: hurrying masses poured in and out of the shafts of the Métros: a girl with a red shawl sold bunches of yellow mimosa: a villainous-looking hawker invited Jean to buy a guide to Paris and a fat lady with

THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN FRANCE

hoarse voice, ensconced in a tiny brightly painted kiosk, urged David to try his luck in the National Lottery—'Every ticket a winner, Monsieur!' It was all as different from the sabbath quiet of Sunday morning in Edinburgh as could be imagined.

'Goodness! Is there something special on?' exclaimed Jean.

'No, I don't think so, Mother says L'Étoile's always busy', said David, reading the headings on the papers in a kiosk by a Metro entrance. 'Look Jean! They've got all the English papers besides the French. There's *The Times*, the *Manchester Guardian*, the——'

'Never mind the papers', interrupted Jean. 'The question is how are we going to get across to the Arc?'

This was a real problem. The traffic was very thick and fast, there seemed to be no recognized crossing-places to the centre of the Star, and the whole business was complicated by the fact that, as David put it, 'All the traffic was travelling on the wrong side', that is all the vehicles, as everywhere in France (and in many other continental countries), were travelling on the right instead of the left side of the roadways.

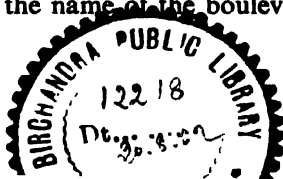
'Oh, this is silly', said David when they had stood hesitating for about a minute on the edge of the kerb. 'Come on, Jean, let's make a dash for it!' Waiting their chance they darted through the stream of cars, and were soon standing beneath the Arc which, they learned, from an inscription, was 'Dedicated to all the French Armies since 1792'. But though they were both impressed by the 'Undying Flame' which, symbolizing the spirit of the French people, burns day and night by the grave of the 'Unknown Soldier', the Arc de Triomphe was a bit of a disappointment. The crowds on the Star *trottoirs* (pavements) were far more interesting.

'Had enough?' asked David. 'I think we should get back. I'm beginning to feel hungry.'

'So am I', confessed Jean. 'Which way is it?'

From the Arc in the centre of the Place de L'Étoile all the avenues looked alike.

'Wait a bit', said David. 'When we saw it first it was sort of side-ways on. You didn't look at the name of the boulevard we came up, did you?'



LOST ON L'ÉTOILE

'I'm afraid not', said Jean, ruefully, 'but there was a Métro station at the top of it, I remember.'

'So there was! And there's a Métro over there!'

But of course it was the wrong Métro entrance and they had to make a circuit of the greater part of the Star before they found the avenue leading down to the street where Madame Draguille's flat was.

'We're going to be fearfully late', panted Jean, as they trotted round in a huge circle, 'and we thought it would only take a few minutes!' They were even later than they imagined and when at last they did get home breakfast was over.

'Where on earth have you been?' cried Mrs Robertson. 'Do you know you've been out nearly an hour!'

'We got lost', confessed Jean.

'You should keep out of the side streets until you know the city better', said Madame Draguille, fretfully. 'If you keep to the main avenues and boulevards Paris is a very easy city to find your way about in but the side streets are difficult and dangerous.'

'We weren't in any side streets,' said David ruefully. 'We got lost on L'Étoile!'

Chapter 3

PARIS UNDER SNOW

PIERRE and Jacqueline arrived as David and Jean were finishing their coffee and rolls—the usual French breakfast. Cousins of the Robertson children, they were twins aged fifteen, but did not look at all alike. Pierre was tall, thin, and serious-looking. Jacqueline was a plump girl with glossy brown ringlets and dark eyes which at the moment looked rather anxious. They greeted Mr and Mrs Robertson warmly, but shook hands somewhat stiffly with Jean and David.

‘Aren’t your father and mother coming?’ asked Madame Draguille anxiously. ‘I am expecting *everyone* for lunch to-day.’

French people of the older generation are very punctilious about keeping up family connections and Madame Draguille was true to type.

‘They’re coming along later’, explained Pierre, and shot a self-conscious glance at David. ‘Jacqueline and I came early because we thought David and Jean might like to be taken around a bit.’

‘That would be grand’, said Jean and David together.

‘Don’t you think it’s a bit cold to go out walking?’ said Madame Draguille, turning to Mrs Robertson.

Mrs Robertson laughed.

‘This is *warm* for us, Mother. I think it’s a very good idea. If David and Jean stay in they’ll be bored to death with all the family gossip.’

‘What do you think of the twins?’ David asked Jean as they were getting ready to go out.

‘Jacqueline doesn’t look very pleased to see us, does she?’ said Jean.

‘That’s just what I was thinking’, said David

At first it looked as if the expedition was going to be a dismal failure. Pierre did his best to make polite conversation but was obviously ill at ease, and as for Jacqueline, she marched along in silence and with a look on her face as if she was suffering from a violent toothache. It was altogether too much for Jean. Suddenly she could stand it no longer. She stopped short and refused to move another step.

'Look here! I can't stand this', she cried, looking straight at Jacqueline. 'Don't you want us to come with you? We can easily manage by ourselves if you've something better to do, you know.'

'No, no', said Pierre in real distress. 'It's not that at all. It's——' He stopped, and brother and sister exchanged wild looks for a moment.

'Well, what is it?' asked Jean impatiently.

Then at last Jacqueline spoke.

'It sounds mad', she said, 'but do you jump a lot, Jean?'

Jean took a step back in astonishment.

'Jump!' she repeated. 'How do you mean—jump?'

'You know—skip'. Jacqueline made the motions of plying a skipping-rope.

'Well, I used to, of course', said Jean, 'but I haven't for years and years'.

'Oh, thank heaven!' cried Jacqueline, with a great sigh of relief and at once began to look quite happy.

'But what's it all about?' asked Jean, bewildered at this sudden change.

'I don't get it either', said David shaking his head.

Then Jacqueline explained.

A girl called Toinon in her class at school had had an English pen-friend who had come to Paris for a holiday. Jacqueline's classmate had taken her to see all the sights of the city, but the English girl was not at all interested. All she wanted to do was to go to the parks and skip and one day, while they were on the Champs Élysées the English girl had begun to skip there and to Toinon's horror they had been seen by some girls from the Lycée. Poor Toinon had been ragged about it for months afterwards.

'And you were afraid I would embarrass you in the same way?' laughed Jean.

'Well, just a little', admitted Jacqueline. 'I'm sorry I was so silly, Jean.'

'It's not that we think there is anything wrong with jumping', explained Pierre, earnestly. 'It's just that it isn't done here except by very small children.'

'I say, I hope you don't mind my boots!' said David suddenly.

'Boots?' repeated Pierre.

'David put climbing-nails into all his boots and shoes', explained Jean, 'and if there are any mountains in the Champs Élysées I won't say what might happen.'

'I say, do you really climb?' asked Pierre, excitedly. 'I love climbing. I went up the Dent du Midi on Mont Blanc last summer. It was heavenly!'

'I should say so! Golly, Mont Blanc! I've done a bit of rock-climbing with Dad in Skye and in the Western Highlands at home. But Mont Blanc! Did you go up on the ice too?'

'Well, we crossed the Glacier des Bossons. It's not really dangerous when you're roped. But I say, there's our bus. Come on, we'll have to run!'

After that all went smoothly. They caught their bus, scrambled aboard, and were soon bowling down the Avenue des Champs Élysées, perched on the open platform at the back of the car and with Pierre and Jacqueline pointing out the sights, including the more famous shops.

'They're mostly motor show-rooms at this end', Pierre told her. 'Then art dealers and dress shops. But look! Here's the Rond Point and the start of the gardens. They go on right down to the Place de la Concorde. It's strange to see them all covered with snow! We hardly ever have snow in Paris, you know. I can only remember one other winter when it lay so long. Usually it melts as soon as it falls.'

'Do they still hold Punch and Judy shows in the Champs Élysées in the summer?' asked Jean. 'I remember Mother telling us about that.'

'Punch and Judy?—oh you mean *Guignol*! Yes. It still goes on. This part of the Champs Élysées is awfully jolly in summer.'

'What are those buildings over there through the trees on the right—where the kids are sledging?' asked David, pointing.

'They're the Grand and the Petit Palais. They were built for the World's Fair held here at the beginning of the century. They hold art exhibitions in them nowadays. There's an exhibition of Italian art in the Petit Palais, now. Would you like to visit it?'

'Jean would, probably. She likes playing about with paints, but I think we ought to see the outside of things first', said David, 'especially since it's such a fine day. But I say, I know this place.' The bus was now crossing an enormous square. 'It's the Place de la Concorde, isn't it? Look, Jean, there's the Egyptian Obelisk.'

'And that's the Gardens of the Tuileries', added Jacqueline. 'This is the very centre of Paris. The Palace was burnt down in 1870. It is what's called a formal garden—very geometrical. Many people admire it, but Pierre and I prefer the gardens in the Champs Élysées or better still the Bois de Boulogne. They're more natural.'

'The small object on the right', said Pierre as the bus careered down arcaded Rue de Rivoli, 'is, of course, the Louvre.'

The Louvre seemed to be endless. The niched wall with its sculptured figures went on and on and on.

'Goodness! Does it never stop', cried Jean craning out round the side of the bus to see where the great Palace Museum ended. 'It must take hours to go round it.'

'Hours, my dear Jean. It would take you weeks!' laughed Jacqueline. 'This is only a tiny bit of it. The Louvre is not the British Museum, the National Gallery, the Tate, and half a dozen other art collections all in one.'

'The only way to visit the Louvre is by bus or tube', said Pierre, seriously.

'Are you pulling our legs?' asked David.

'No, I'm quite serious. You would die of exhaustion or starvation if you tried to see all the Louvre at one visit! What you must do is to study the catalogue carefully, decide which section interests you, and then take the bus or Métro to the nearest gate. But look sharp! This is where we get off.'

The bus had stopped near the Rue du Pont Neuf, and down this street, towards the Seine, Pierre now led the way.

'Where are we going now?' asked Jean.

'To Professor Pierre's lecture-room, where he will deliver his celebrated lecture "Paris in ten seconds"', said Jacqueline, mischievously.

'Oh, shut up, Jacqueline!' said Pierre, flushing.

'What's the joke?' asked David, mystified.

'Look up!' commanded Jacqueline.

Jean and David looked where she pointed. Over an arm of the River Seine, now flooded with snow-water, and writhing like a green snake between snow-drifted banks, beyond the pepper-pot towers of the Conciergerie where Queen Marie-Antoinette was imprisoned before her execution during 'The Terror', beyond the gilded spire of the Sainte-Chapelle, they could see the massive towers, familiar from a hundred photographs and paintings, of the ancient Cathedral of Paris.

'Notre Dame!' cried Jean and David together.

'I hope you're good at stairs', said Jacqueline, 'Professor Pierre's lecture-room is at the very top and there isn't any lift!'

Notre Dame is so perfectly proportioned that its true height is not perceptible from a distance. It was, as Jacqueline had warned them, a stiff climb to the top of the tower, but the view was worth it. The great Cathedral, which stands on an island in the Seine, overlooks almost all the city, and towers above the many-storeyed old houses of the Île de la Cité like Gulliver over the roofs of Lilliput. To David and Jean, hanging, breathless, on to the snowy parapet at the very top of the tower, the fussy little steamboats puffing up and down the green river looked no larger than flies, and the strings of black barges swinging in the current like caterpillars and centipedes. Motor-cars, bowling across bridges and down the quays, looked like enamelled beetles. The people in the streets were only specks.

Down the river, sweeping away in a great green curve to the south and crossed by bridge beyond bridge, they could see, delicate as a pencil-drawing against the bright sky, the meccano-like tracery of the Eiffel Tower girders. On every side domes and spires of palaces and churches rose glittering above the snowy ridges of the city roofs. The great green roof of the Cathedral itself, partially bared of snow, was like the half-folded wings of an enormous bird, and about them in their airy solitude they had

for company perhaps the strangest stone-carvings in the world—the famous gargoyles of Notre Dame: weird creatures part animal, part human, part devilish, part angelic, who, from niche and parapet, from wall and tower, have looked out over the city of Paris with strange stone eyes for century after century.

'Isn't it wonderful!' breathed Jean.

'It certainly is', agreed David. 'It's—it's better than being up in an aeroplane!'

'That's true', nodded Pierre. 'I once flew over Paris in an aeroplane but when you're high up everything flattens out. Up here you're just at the right height, high enough to see everything and yet not too high to see the buildings as they were meant to be seen. However, I didn't really bring you up here to admire the view. I thought since you may be going about by yourselves later on in the year, after you get back from the south, it might be useful if I gave you a general idea of the city's layout. Paris is really a very easy city to find your way about in, if only you remember that it's shaped very like those cakes you have in England at Easter'.

'Cakes?' repeated Jean, puzzled.

'Are they not cakes? You have them on Good Friday, I think. They've got crosses on them.'

'Oh! You mean hot-cross buns!' laughed David.

'Yes, hot-cross buns', agreed Pierre. 'Well, Paris is just like one of your hot-cross buns.'

'With icing', put in Jacqueline, looking at the snowy roofs.

'Don't interrupt!' said Pierre, severely. 'The Île de la Cité, where we are now, is the centre of the cross, and the four points are L'Étoile in the west where we got the bus this morning, the Place de la Nation in the east, the Gare de l'Est in the north and in the south the Place Denfert-Rochereau where the entrance to the catacombs is. If you just keep these five points in mind you'll find your way about quite easily.'

'And so concluded the lecture', said Jacqueline, yawning. 'But if you want my advice, *mes enfants*, if you get lost go straight to the Métro, buy a ticket and keep travelling and changing until you arrive at the station you want!'

'Wouldn't that be a bit expensive?' asked David with a grin.

'Not at all. It's the same price however far you travel. And now I think we'd better be catching the Métro ourselves or we'll be late and Father and Mother will be worrying.'

'They wouldn't really worry about you, would they?' Jean asked Jacqueline, as they were going down the long winding stair.

'They certainly would', said Jacqueline, with a sigh. 'You don't know French parents. They simply cannot believe that their children are able to look after themselves. They're *always* worrying!'

Underground, in the tubular tunnels of the Métro through which the red, brown, and cream-coloured trains roar and clatter, not only all day, but far into the night, it smelt, as David remarked, 'exactly like a turkish-bath' and was twice as warm as on the streets above. When they reached their *quai* it was already crowded, and so, when it arrived, was the train. But somehow or other everybody squeezed aboard, though the crush was so great that Jean could hardly breathe, and the last lady to enter the carriage was only wedged in when one of the Station Controllers put his shoulder into the small of her back and pushed with all his force. This spectacle reminded Jean so much of her father's struggle, when they were preparing for this journey, to close a suitcase which was already packed to capacity, that, for all her aching ribs, she began to giggle.

'What's the joke?' called Jacqueline who, with the wisdom of a practised traveller, had nipped behind one of the slender metal pillars which protected her from the crush.

'It's that lady—the way the official shoved her on', explained Jean, still laughing. 'If it had been in Britain he wouldn't have been pushing her on. He'd have been pulling her off!'

'Goodness!' she exclaimed as they emerged into daylight again. 'Here's the Arc de Triomphe again!'

'It's always like that in Paris', said Pierre. 'The big squares and road-centres—like the five points I told you about when we were up on the tower of Notre Dame—are like great harbours giving entry to the different regions of the city. If you want to get from one part to another you are pretty sure to have to pass through one of them.'

Chapter 4

‘UPSIDE DOWN’

WHEN the sightseers got back to the Rue de l'Arc de Triomphe the flat was full of visitors. Cécile and Madame Draguille were preparing the table for lunch; Leo was strutting about with a bottle of champagne which he had won at a street fair shooting-booth (to which Cécile had taken him while out shopping); Mr and Mrs Robertson were in the drawing-room with the guests, of which there were so many that David and Jean were quite bewildered by the time they had—according to French custom—shaken hands with everyone. The only people they were absolutely sure about were the twins' father, Uncle André, a banker, tall, stout, dark and smiling, with a huge bald head and soft white hands; Tante Muriel, his wife, who was Mrs Robertson's sister and very like her; and another cousin Jacques—really a second cousin—who worked as a journalist on a Paris newspaper and who had had, they knew, all sorts of thrilling adventures fighting with the Maquis during the war.

During lunch, which consisted of *hors d'oeuvres* (olives and *saucisson*, or smoked sausage), a cheese soufflé, roast pork with baked potatoes and *petits pois* (very small green peas), a chicory salad and, for dessert, *nègre en chemise* (chocolate cake, whipped cream and custard), the conversation was mostly about French politics and the ideas of a new French author and philosopher who was then being much talked about. David and Jean, neither of whom were interested in politics and to whom the philosopher under discussion was only a name, had to sit dumbly through this conversation and were very surprised when both Pierre and Jacqueline contributed to it and were listened to with respect by their elders. Pierre in particular seemed to know a great deal about the new philosopher. Later, when the young people had

slipped away to Jean's bedroom, leaving their elders to continue their talk over their wine and cigarettes, David asked how he came to know so much about philosophy, and learned, with surprise, that it was one of the subjects studied at the school his cousin attended.

'Only in the last year, though', admitted Pierre. 'Still, we touch on it here and there, in other subjects, right through the course. I'm looking forward to the proper classes very much.'

'Do you two go to the same school?' asked Jean, and made Pierre and Jacqueline chuckle.

'No, I go to the Lycée Janson de Sailly and Jacqueline to the Lycée Molière. Boys' and girls' schools are almost always separate in France except in the smallest villages. Isn't it like that in Britain?'

'Not in Scotland,' said David, 'at least not in most of our schools. We have what is called co-education.'

'You have many different kinds of schools, don't you?' said Jacqueline. 'I mean private boarding-schools like Eton and Harrow, besides the State schools. Here we have only got two kinds—State schools and a few private schools mostly run by the churches. Nearly everybody goes to the State schools—*les écoles communales* for Primary, the *Lycées* and *Collèges* for Secondary education'.

'What exactly is the difference between a *lycée* and a *collège*?' asked David.

'Well, that's rather hard to explain', said Pierre, looking perplexed. 'How would you explain it, Jacqueline?'

'Well, the *lycées* have a great tradition behind them,' said Jacqueline, 'whereas most of the *collèges*——' She made a face. 'Though I suppose some of them are all right', she added, without much conviction.

'Don't listen to these two if they run down the *collèges*!' said Jacques, joining them in time to hear the last remarks. 'Being *lycées* products they're highly prejudiced. In fact there's hardly any difference between the *lycées* and *collèges* at present. At one time you had to pay a small fee—a very small one indeed I should add—to attend the primary departments of the *lycées*, but that was abolished some time ago. Whether you go to

'UPSIDE DOWN'

a *lycée* or a *collège* is now very much a question of where you live.'

'Do you have to pay fees to attend your secondary schools here?' asked Jean.

'No, these are free here. In France children go either to *l'école communale* or the primary department of a *lycée* at the age of six. When they're eleven or twelve—depending on how clever they are—they sit a qualifying examination and if they are successful they go on to a *lycée* or *collège*. Most of the colleges are modern and give what's called a technical education. Boys who are taking up engineering or scientific jobs usually go there. The *lycées*—which date back to Napoleon—have both technical and classical sides—with the emphasis on the classical. But look here! You don't want to talk about school to-day. I've got my buggy with me. Would you like me to take you for a run? How about going to the Bois de Boulogne?'

'That's what I call a sensible idea!' cried David, jumping up.

'It does seem a pity to stay indoors', said Jean.

'What about you two?' asked Jacques, turning to the twins.

Pierre looked dubious. 'Of course we'd like to, Jacques, but I'm sure Mother and Father will expect us to go on with them to Uncle Henri's house. Don't you think so, Jacqueline?'

Jacqueline nodded and sighed. 'I'm afraid so. Still, we can ask.'

While the twins were in the drawing-room David and Jean, puzzled, looked at Jacques inquiringly. Jacques shrugged his shoulders.

'*C'est la France*', he said. 'I suppose this is the day they usually visit their Uncle Henri. Probably Uncle Henri bores them and almost certainly they bore Uncle Henri, but that doesn't matter. The conventions must be observed.'

'But that's silly!' protested Jean. 'After all Pierre and Jacqueline are practically grown-up—look how much Pierre knows about philosophy! Surely they can choose their own friends now?'

'Not in this country', said Jacques. 'It's true that Pierre and his sister have a great deal of knowledge of the sort that comes from books. Education is much more bookish than yours—but I think you'll find that French boys and girls have little practical freedom compared with children in England. Their lives are arranged for

them by their parents until they are quite old. At least that was the old system. Now that we have Scout and Girl Guide troops and the Youth Hostel movement, young French men and women are developing a new sense of self-reliance, but changes of that sort take time. When I was a kid, up to the age of ten, I was never even allowed out by myself! I had always to be accompanied either by my parents or a nurse—even just to go to a park not ten minutes' walk away!

As Jacques finished speaking the twins returned looking very pleased with themselves. A compromise had been arrived at. They had not wriggled out of the visit to *Oncle Henri*, but they had received permission to accompany Jean and David for part of the drive, after which they were to go direct to *Oncle Henri's* house.

Jacques' car, which was parked at the gate of the flats, was very small, but they all piled in somehow and a few moments later were whizzing yet once more round their old friend the *Arc de Triomphe* and so down the *Avenue Foch*, a handsome road, almost as broad as the *Champs Élysées* and with garden strips, trees, and public benches on either side.

'What a lot of trees there must be in Paris', commented Jean. 'You see them everywhere. On the streets, in the parks, and above the walls of private gardens.'

'There's supposed to be nearly one hundred thousand in public places alone,' said Jacques, 'but the petrol fumes kill off a great number every year. There's a municipal garden at the north end of the *Bois* to supply the parks and gardens belonging to the Municipality of Paris. What is it, Pierre?'

'Go up the *Rue de la Pompe*', suggested Pierre. 'Then David and Jean can see my school.'

'*Comme vous voulez!*' said Jacques, and swung the car down the second turning on the left—the *Rue de la Pompe*.

The school was at the far end of the *Rue* near the juncture with the *Avenue Henri Martin*, the main road to the *Bois* from the city centre. It presented a rather forbidding façade, broken only by niches in which busts were inset, and by an arched gateway.

'Disappointed?' asked Pierre as the school slipped behind.

'Well, yes, a little', admitted David. 'It's rather gloomy, isn't it?'

'UPSIDE DOWN'

'Not really', said Pierre. 'Once you're inside it's quite different. You see the *lycées* of Paris are all either old convents or were built on the convent plan. The buildings look inward towards the interior courtyard. What you see from the street is really the backs of the buildings.'

'Haven't you any playing-fields?' asked David.

'Not within the school', said Pierre. 'There's still very little sport at our schools, though the authorities are trying to encourage it.'

'Don't you think it would be a good thing if you had more?' suggested David.

Pierre wrinkled his brow. 'I don't know. I suppose it would be all right if we had it in school hours, but I like to have my Thursdays free.'

'Your Thursdays free?' exclaimed Jean. 'Don't you go to school on Thursday?'

'No, it's a holiday. Don't you have one on Saturdays? We go to school then.'

'It's all upside down', said David. 'Holidays on Thursdays. School on Saturdays. Traffic travelling on the wrong side of the road—'

'The *right* side, you mean', put in Jacques.

'Shops open on Sundays', went on David ignoring him, 'School buildings turned inside out—'

'Tut-tut, that's nothing', said Jacques, as he pulled the car up by the side of the Bois de Boulogne. 'The big lake over there through the trees is called Lac Inférieur and its little brother, just next to it, is Lac Supérieur. However, you'll be glad to hear that the trees grow just the same way up as across the channel—and don't they look fine!'

The Bois de Boulogne is the principal playground of Paris. In summer when the trees are in heavy leaf its shady groves are a favourite rendezvous for family picnic parties (of which the French are very fond), but now the wintry trees bore only snow blossoms and the forest aisles were almost deserted. Except for half a dozen boys and girls throwing snowballs, a lady in a fur cap and high boots with a boy of about Leo's age dragging a sledge, and a young man and woman in smart ski suits who in the far distance

were trying not very successfully to ski, they seemed to have the great wood to themselves.

'Snow's too soft for skis', said Jacques, watching the last couple with a critical eye. 'They might have managed it yesterday, but not to-day. But let's go over to the lakes, shall we?'

There are several lakes in the Bois de Boulogne. The mis-named Lac Inférieur is biggest. It is nearly a mile long but quite narrow, with two carrot-shaped islands separated by the narrowest of channels in the centre. Much of the life of the Bois centres round this lake, and on hot summer Sundays flotillas of rowing-boats laden with plump French families, all dressed in their best, can be seen rowing round and round the islands. Monsieur, stripped to his waistcoat, his face glistening with perspiration and flushed with effort, plies the oars. Madame, shading herself beneath her parasol, reclines gracefully in the stern. The children in frilly frocks or very short shorts, hang over the sides trailing their fingers in the water and studying the occupants of the other boats with those curiously solemn eyes with which young French children seem almost invariably to regard the world—perhaps to balance the lightheartedness with which, as a rule, they come to look upon life when grown up. But on this cold February day, not boats, but patterns of sodden grey ice floated on the lake. The snow-heaped islands were deserted and silent. A chilly air rose from the surface of the water. Jean shivered and turned up her coat collar, gazing around her at the forest park which seemed to stretch away endlessly.

'Isn't it huge!' she said.

'About two thousand acres', said Jacques, blowing on his hands to warm them. 'But Brr! This is no day for exploring. Come on, let's get back to the car.'

It really was very cold now. Dark clouds were rolling up from the east. The sun, low in the sky, glowed through the netted branches like the last red cinder through the bars of a grate. Their shadows on the snow were immense.

'And they call this "Sunny France"! ' said David snuggling in under the rug at the back of the car.

'Wait till you get to the south', said Jacqueline. 'Then it's the heat you'll be complaining about!'

'UPSIDE DOWN'

'Well, where are we going now?' asked Jean, as Jacques swung the car out into the roadway.

'Where would you like to go?'

'Could we go to Montmartre?'

'*A votre service, Mademoiselle!* But what about Pierre and Jacqueline?'

'Drop us at the Parc Monceau—that's quite near Uncle Henri's, and it's on the way', Pierre suggested, and so it was agreed.

'Will you still be here on Thursday?' asked Jacqueline as she and her brother got out at the Park gates. 'If you are perhaps we could meet you then?'

'I'm afraid we'll be away by then', said David regretfully. 'I'm not sure when we leave, but at the very latest it will be on Wednesday, probably sooner.'

'Oh well, we'll just have to wait till you come back, when I hope you'll stay longer. You haven't seen anything of Paris yet, and anyway, it's quite the wrong time of the year for it. You really must see the summer dress parade on the Champs Élysées, Jean. It's better than a mannequin parade!'

'Try to come to the Alps too!' David shouted to Pierre as the car moved off.

'Just wish I could!' shouted back Pierre. 'And remember what I told you about the glaciers. Take an old pair of socks to draw over your boots; the nails slip!'

With the Parc Monceau and the waving figures of Pierre and Jacqueline behind them, they drove on down the Boulevard de Courcelles and its continuation, Batignolles, as far as the Place Clichy, another important road and Metro centre. Then, deserting the broad avenues and boulevards, they mounted the steep narrow twisting streets of Montmartre, until they came to a halt before a strange high building that lifted a huge, pale, pear-shaped dome into the darkening sky.

'Is it Sacré Coeur?' asked Jean. 'It looks like something out of the Arabian Nights!'

'Yes, this is the Church of Sacré Coeur', said Jacques. 'And you're quite right about the Arabian nights, Jean. Sacré Coeur was built in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when Eastern styles and ideas were all the rage in Paris—you can see

the same influence in the stories of writers like Pierre Loti and Gautier.'

'Leaving the car they crossed the terrace and stood for a moment gazing over the roofs and gables of Montmartre towards the city centre, where a million lamps glimmered in the blue dusk. A dark bubble against the radiance flooding up from the streets behind was the dome of the Panthéon. The Seine, to the south-west, was a gleaming opaline thread. The searchlight on the summit of the Eiffel Tower swept the horizon. The muffled roar of traffic, the shrill piping of a roundabout, and the tinny music from some *café chantant*, mingled with the sound of the organ in the church behind.

'It's like a scene from an opera', breathed Jean, drinking it in with eyes and ears. 'This really is Paris as I always imagined it, Jacques.'

'It certainly makes you understand why poets and artists lived up here', admitted David, who though not as susceptible to atmosphere as Jean, was almost as impressed on this occasion. 'Is it true that they've all left Montmartre now, Jacques? Mother says they've all been driven away by the tourists.'

'Oh, there're a few left yet', smiled Jacques, 'though it's true that most of the "artyness" of modern Montmartre is just a show put up to please American and English visitors. The artists didn't live up here because it was picturesque, though. They lived here because it was cheap. They used to hold exhibitions of paintings and drawings in an open space called the Place Constantin-Pecqueur, just below those houses on the left. It was called the Foire aux Croûtes which means roughly the "Crust", or Pot-boiler Fair, though very good paintings were often picked up there. The most famous part of Montmartre, however, is the Place Pigalle further down. In the hey-day of Bohemianism if you went there in the early morning you would find dozens of Italian artists' models in brightly-coloured costumes waiting by the fountain for some artist to engage them. But we'd better get on our way. You'll explore Montmartre properly when you return to Paris later in the year. Was it Wednesday you said you were leaving?'

'Yes, at least that's what Mum and Dad had in mind', said David.

'UPSIDE DOWN'

But when they got back to Madame Draguille's a surprise awaited them. Their parents, who had been out visiting friends in the Port Royal district, were busy packing.

'What's happening?' asked David.

'We're going to the land of the orange-trees!' announced Leo, somewhat thickly, through one of Cécile's macaroons.

'When?'

'To-morrow afternoon', said Mr Robertson. 'Here, hold this strap, David.'

'We thought it was stupid to stay on in Paris when the weather is so bad', explained Mrs Robertson, busily sorting out the clothes they would require in the south. 'So we've decided to go south now and stay longer in Paris on our way back. *Maman* is going to join us during the Easter holidays.'

'We're going swimming', said Leo, 'we're going swimming in the sea, and it'll be blue and hot.'

Jean looked out of the window. The snow was falling again, the white flakes fluttering like moths at the darkly gleaming pane.

'Will it really be warm enough for that?' she asked incredulously.

'Certainly not', said Madame Draguille, shaking her head. 'Bathing in February! Why! You would get your death of cold. The sea is icy just now.'

'Your grandmother means it is almost as cold as it is with us in June!' said Mr Robertson.

Chapter 5

THE VALLEY OF THE RHÔNE

THE following morning was, David said, 'simply wasted' in a shopping expedition on the boulevards, when he and Leo each acquired new sandals and a pair of very short French shorts, and Jean a rather pretty red and white dress which consoled her a little for not being allowed to wander off to the Louvre. Then after lunch there was a great to-do making up sandwiches and flasks of hot coffee for the journey, so that it seemed no time at all before the taxi which was to take them to the Gare de Lyon was hooting at the entrance to the courtyard.

Madame Draguille and Cécile came with them to the station and, just as the huge green *rapide* began to move off, Pierre and Jacqueline came dashing down the platform, in time to give them a farewell wave and to shout something which was lost in the noise of the train and the bawling of the porters. Then the lights of the station—it was already dusk—fell behind and they settled down to compose themselves for the fifteen-hour journey to St Raphaël.

They were all, for different reasons, sorry to leave Paris, but Jean most of all, and as the suburbs of the city fell behind and she watched through the half-misted glass of the carriage window the lights of the train skipping along the permanent way, now leaping up on the snowy parapets of bridges, now plunging down the drifted embankments to play tig with the fence palings and surprised trees, she wondered nostalgically what in the south could compare with the enchantments she was leaving. She had been looking forward to exploring Paris so much—the picture galleries, the theatres, the cafés, the Palace of Versailles. And however nice it might be in Provence it couldn't possibly be—but at this point in her melancholy musings she became aware that her father was smiling at her.

THE VALLEY OF THE RHÔNE

'What's the matter, Jean?' he asked.

Jean confessed. 'It's not that I don't want to go south', she explained. 'Of course I want to see that part of France too, but I just can't see why we have to rush away from Paris so soon. I thought we would have stayed for a week at least.'

'Well, as a matter of fact, Jean, it's to keep an appointment', said Mr Robertson, mysteriously. 'With the spring', he explained after a pause.

'But it won't be spring for ages yet!' exclaimed Jean.

'Not up here, but it's due to arrive any day now where we're going. In the south it arrives all at once—like a tidal wave. It's the most wonderful time of the year but it only lasts a week or two. It would be silly to miss it for the sake of trudging about city streets in the snow. Don't worry, Jean! You won't regret Paris when you see the carloads of spring blossoms rumbling along the roads to the Grasse scent factories.'

'The farm where we'll be staying is quite near to Grasse, isn't it?' said Jean, brightening up. 'Will we be able to go there and see the perfumeries, do you think?'

'Surely. We'll travel about quite a lot I hope later in the year. But look here,' he added, 'if you want to know about the part we'll be staying in, read it up for yourself', and he tossed one of the books he had with him, and settled back to another. Jean opened the book. It was a travel book about Provence. She turned the pages until she came to the section on Grasse.

'I think I'll see what's doing up the train', said David, rising. 'These seats are horribly hard and I'm getting stiff already.'

'Take care you don't go out of the wrong door', his mother warned in so serious a tone that her son turned in surprise.

'Golly! It must be catching', he said, grinning.

'Catching? What *do* you mean, David?' asked Mrs Robertson.

'Jacqueline and Pierre were telling us how fussy French parents are about their children', explained David and disappeared down the corridor before parental retribution could take effect.

'Train's packed with French sailors', he reported when he returned from his tour of the corridors. 'Some are singing, some drinking, and they've all been eating garlic!'

'They'll be going to join the Mediterranean Fleet at Toulon',

THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN FRANCE

said Mrs Robertson. 'We'll pass through the town to-morrow morning. And now for goodness' sake sit down, David!'

'Yes. I wish you would', sighed Jean, who having exhausted her book's comments on Grasse was now reading about the River Rhône.

David sat down reluctantly.

'Got over your blues?' he asked his sister offensively, but Jean, refusing to be drawn, only gave him a disdainful look and returned to her book, leaving him no alternative but to root out his own reading matter, which happened to be Daudet's autobiographical novel *My Brother Jack*. So, unknown to each other, brother and sister both read of the same river, a river now rushing from its source in the high Swiss Alps at an angle which would make contact with the line of the railroad on which they were travelling at the great city of Lyons where the French silk-weaving industry is centred.

The Rhône, which bounds the old kingdom of Provence to the west, is not only one of the great rivers of France, but also one of the great rivers of the world. From the time the Greek colonists settled at Marseilles, more than two thousand five hundred years ago, until the coming of the railways, it was the main way into France from the south, and vessels from all over the Mediterranean have sailed on it; Genoan tartans, brigantines from Syria; ships with the square white sails of Greece and the triangular ones of the Marseilles region; many-oared Roman galleys.

In the Middle Ages, strong castles and towers were erected along the banks of the Rhône to protect it in times of war and foreign invasion, and in this respect the river is like the Rhine on the north-eastern frontier of France. But in another way the Rhône can be compared with an even greater river—the Egyptian Nile. Year after year, century after century, as it sweeps through France on its long journey from the Alps, it brings with its flood waters soil and decaying vegetable matter, reeds, grasses and even trees, which it has washed away far in the interior. Some of this rich compost falls into the marshes through which the Rhône passes, by its seven mouths, into the sea, and so extends the land here; the rest is washed right out into the Mediterranean where

THE VALLEY OF THE RHÔNE

it piles up in muddy banks, which eventually emerge above the water as new islands.

Jean read also about the Camargue, a great flat island between the two principal channels into which the Rhône divides near the coast. The Camargue is like nowhere else in France and perhaps like nowhere else in the world. It is a vast rolling plain covered for the most part with a salty grass called *ingannes*, with great treacherous marshes in the midst, and other marshes around—a sort of miniature wild west, a land of bulls and wild horses where, under a fierce red sun, coarse grass and tufted reeds wave to a blue horizon, and where the air dances and shimmers in a perpetual mirage. The few people who live on this island are almost as strange as their country. They live in lonely ranch-houses and a few isolated villages deep in the sea of grass. They are fine horsemen, like the cowboys of Texas and the gauchos of South America, and their sports, too, are like those of the gauchos and cowboys. They hold rodeos, when wild horses taken from the herds which gallop about the plain are tamed and broken, and they fight bulls. The object of the Camarguen bull-fight, however, is not to kill the bull, but to snatch from its head without hurting it (and without being hurt in the process) coloured rosettes or cockades which have been attached before the start of the fight. The young boys of the Camargue play the same game with the bull calves.

After a meal at about half-past nine, the Robertsons (except Mr Robertson, who had read steadily since the train steamed out of Paris and looked as if he would read on for ever) settled down to get some sleep. French third-class carriages are not always so comfortable as those in Britain. In older types the seats are hard and covered with slippery brown American oil-cloth, and the back support is set at a height guaranteed to give a crick in the neck to all travellers except giants—a strange arrangement, since French people are on an average considerably shorter than British. However, the meal and the monotonous singing of the wheels had made Jean sleepy. She dozed off eventually and must have slept for several hours for when she woke up and peered out of the window she was surprised to see far below,

silvery in the moonlight, a broad river rushing down a wooded gorge parallel with the railway line. The far bank of the river was in deep black shadow and she could not make out details of the landscape, but there seemed to be something queer about it and after a moment of perplexity she realized what it was. There was no snow here! The train had already taken them into a different climate. Jean was so excited that she felt she must tell someone about it, but when she looked round the carriage all the rest of the family were asleep.

For a moment Jean was tempted to pinch David—who was sleeping with his mouth open, but she was afraid that if she did he would start a shindy. In the end, after she had watched the river slipping past for about ten minutes more, her own eyes closed again and the next she knew it was she who was being pinched awake by David; the sky framed in the carriage window was full of small pink clouds, and her mother was asking her if she wanted coffee.

'Oh yes, please', she yawned. Then, as she sat up, she stared in surprise at the countryside which they were passing. Everything was different. The vegetation, the colour of the earth, the shapes of the houses, even the very contours of the landscape. Everything was brightly coloured and full of light.

'Wh-where are we now?' she stammered. 'Are we at Lyons yet?'

'Lyons!' David was scornful. 'We passed Lyons hours ago! We're almost at Valence.'

'A few more hours and we'll be at Marseilles', smiled her mother.

'Goodness! I must have been sound asleep', cried Jean. She sipped the hot fragrant coffee gratefully, but could not keep her eyes from the window.

'Those are olives, aren't they?' High on a slope to the left was a grove of trees with grey silvery leaves and black twisted trunks—like the trunks of the miniature trees in a Japanese garden.

'Yes, those are olives', Mrs Robertson said. 'That shows we're really in the south now.'

'There're vineyards too,' put in David. 'There's one!—yes the red field with the rows of black stumps. The leaves haven't

THE VALLEY OF THE RHÔNE

started to sprout yet. And there's a palm-tree beside the white house!'

'Where?'

'Over there, stupid. The house with the blue tiles.'

'Oh yes, I see it now.'

'You'll see so many palm-trees from now on you'll be tired of the sight of them', said Mr Robertson.

'Do they have coconuts on?' asked Leo hopefully.

'No, it's not quite hot enough for that', laughed his father, 'but there are some banana-trees, Leo. At a place called Beaulieu between Nice and Mentone. It's so warm there that they call it little Africa. You may see an occasional one in the gardens as we go along the coast from Marseilles. I remember noticing one the last time I was along that line but it looked rather a sickly specimen.'

'There's an almond-tree, Jean', said Mrs Robertson, pointing.

The almond-tree was in full blossom. It rose from the red earth into the blue sky like a dazzling white flame. Jean caught her breath as she looked at it.

'It's like waking up to a new world!' she said, her eyes shining.

As they ate the picnic breakfast and as the train continued south on the next stage of the journey to Marseilles Mr and Mrs Robertson were prodded into delivering a running commentary on the countryside: on Arles, where the Romans had their headquarters when Provence was a Roman province and where there is still an open-air Roman theatre where Greek plays are performed (in French translation) by modern French theatrical companies: on Avignon with the Popes' Palace and its famous bridge *under* which (on an island in the Rhône) the people of this delightful but windy old city used 'to think and dance'; of the strange city of Les Baux, a city of ruins, once ruled over by the descendants of 'Balthazar, the Magician', a city set on a huge red rock honeycombed by passages and fantastic caverns with names straight out of a fairy tale—'The Cave of the Fairies', 'Nightmare Alley', 'The Infernal Aqueduct', 'The Corridor of the Leprechaun', 'The Alley of the Black Lamb', 'The Hall of Exorcism'.

'Wherein is the Table of Porphyry and the Po. of Seven Cats!' added Mr Robertson in sepulchral tones.

'Were they really and truly magicians?' gasped Leo.

'Well, they certainly believed they were and so did the people round about', said his father. 'Indeed, there's a bit of magic goes on at Les Baux still. Right at the top of the rock there's an old church where, on Christmas Eve, the shepherds and shepherdesses from round about offer up a snow-white lamb as a sacrifice. They don't kill the lamb, and during the ceremony they sing Christmas carols, but when Balthazar was alive, very likely the lamb was killed. Yes, Les Baux's a queer place. Very queer indeed.'

Just before Marseilles, where the train stopped for about fifteen minutes, the children had their first sight of the Mediterranean, along the shores of which they would be running during the last stretch of their long train journey. It was a soft, misty blue, which paled towards the horizon till sea and sky faded into each other without a perceptible dividing line. They had only a glimpse of it. Almost immediately huge ugly factory buildings leapt up and blocked the view, and shortly afterwards they ran into the station of Marseilles, where the train was besieged by more French sailors, bound, like those already on board, for the naval base at Toulon. Two of the sailors came into the Robertsons' carriage and, to Jean's surprise, when they spoke to each other she could not make out a word they said; the language they were using was not in the least like French. She looked at her mother inquiringly, and Mrs Robertson framed with her lips the word 'Bretons'. Then Jean understood. The sailors came from Brittany, the Peninsula on the French Atlantic coast opposite the coast of Cornwall, and the language they were speaking was Breton—a Celtic language belonging to the same group as Cornish, Welsh, Erse, Gaelic, and the old language of the Isle of Man.

Marseilles, the second largest city in France, was founded by the Phœcean Greeks two thousand five hundred years ago and has been growing in size and importance ever since. It has picturesque corners—particularly round the Old Harbour where the lighthouse-like church of Notre Dame de la Garde is lifted high on its rock above the dilapidated houses of the old town

THE VALLEY OF THE RHÔNE

and the bristling masts and squat funnels of the ships berthed along the miles of quays—but it does not look its best from the railway line. All that David, Jean, and Leo could see as they peered out of the windows was a wilderness of factory buildings, broken-down sheds, and untidy yards.

'Well, I don't think much of *that*', said David in a disappointed voice as the train chugged off again. 'I thought it would be an exciting place, but it's all factories. If it wasn't for the sunshine and the fact that all the buildings are white and yellow and pink instead of grey and black it could be Glasgow!'

'It is rather like Glasgow in some ways', agreed his father, 'but though it isn't beautiful like Paris it's one of the most important towns in France. Nearly all the French trade with the Mediterranean countries, the Middle and the Far East passes through it, and it's an important manufacturing town besides. They make huge quantities of soap here. Then the people are interesting. Like all big seaports it has an extremely mixed population—Negroes, Moors, Arabs, Chinese, Indians, Polynesians—you can see them all in the streets of Marseilles, as well as citizens of every country in Europe.'

'It was at Marseilles that you had to recite the alphabet in the tram-car, wasn't it?' said Jean.

Mr Robertson nodded. 'That's right Jean. That was on my first visit. It must be, oh, over twenty years ago now! I was going out by tram to a village called Allauch on the outskirts of the city, and during the journey some of the passengers—everybody talks to everyone else in Marseilles—started arguing about English pronunciation. Finally to settle the argument, the tram conductor asked me if I would recite the alphabet, as we sound it.'

One of the sailors who evidently knew a little English and who had been listening to this story chuckled. 'C'est une vraie histoire de Marseilles, Monsieur!' he said.

'No, I assure you, that's a true one', said Mr Robertson.

'What does the sailor mean by a "real" Marseilles story?' Jean asked her mother in a whisper.

'The people of Marseilles are supposed to exaggerate everything', Mrs Robertson explained. 'The classic story is about the

Marseilles fisherman who caught a sardine so big that it blocked up the mouth of the harbour! And talking of fish, that's another thing Marseilles is famous for—its fish soup. *Bouillabaisse* it's called. It's a sort of Irish stew made with several different kinds of fish and shell-fish and tastes very nice indeed. And there's something else about Marseilles that you should know, David.'

'Oh?'

'It's in Dumas' story of Monte Cristo.'

'Of course! Fancy my forgetting that! Then the Château d'If where Monte Cristo was imprisoned is out in the sea there?'

'That's right. It's just out from the harbour.'

The train was now running by the sea-shore and they could see the blue waters splashing in on curving beaches of sand or rocks, or breaking in showers of flashing spray against rocky headlands. On the landward side the colours were equally brilliant. The land looked like a gigantic quilt crumpled up into hills and hollows, and patched over with tiny fields, some green, some brown, some red, some silvery with olive-trees, and dotted, as with confetti, with neat little houses with pink, yellow, or white walls and coloured tiles. On the higher ridges were dark clumps of fir and pine trees. In the gardens of the houses were fruit trees, cypresses and palms, and sometimes, usually where a meagre stream came trickling down a valley, on rocky mounds on the skyline they could see the crumbling castellated walls and sagging red roofs of old villages which looked as if they had been deserted for centuries.

'It gets better and better', said Jean, who was becoming dizzy with trying to look two ways at once so as not to miss anything.

'I wish we could get out', said David, longingly. 'There must be some ripping climbing on those red rocks down there.'

'Gosh!' he cried, suddenly. 'Look at this, Jean!'

Jean craned over to see out of her brother's window. The train was very close to the sea at this point, running along a ridge above a fine broad sandy beach, and down on the beach a young man and woman in bright red bathing costumes were racing towards the blue sea. As Jean and David watched, the bathers put their hands above their heads and plunged into the surf, throwing up a flashing spray.

THE VALLEY OF THE RHÔNE

'Bathing', said Jean, 'bathing in February!' She turned to Leo. 'They're swimming, Leo. Don't you want to see them?'

Leo shook his head, without looking round. His gaze was glued to the landscape on the landward side.

'Can't', he said, shortly.

'Why. What's wrong, Leo?' asked Mrs Robertson, alarmed. 'Don't you feel well?'

'I'm watching out for the banana-tree', said Leo.

Chapter 6

THE SEA AND THE HILLS

THEY reached St Raphaël shortly before one, and found Tante Marcelle waiting for them at the station. She was a pretty, dark-haired girl who did not look much older than Jean, although she was really twenty-two. Marcelle had been married to her farmer-husband René for nearly two years, but either because she still felt a stranger in the south—she came from Paris—or because René was always in her thoughts, she kept introducing his name into the conversation, prefacing every other sentence with the words 'René says', 'according to René', or some similar phrase.

After greetings had been exchanged she told them that the bus which was to take them to the farm—called Les Olives—would not leave for more than an hour. So they dumped their luggage at the station office and she whisked them off to a restaurant ('René says it's the best') where they all had a much needed wash and brush-up before sitting down to lunch.

The restaurant was a huge place, all glass, chromium, and gleaming mirrors, but only a few tables, decorated with sprigs of yellow mimosa, were in use. Besides themselves, there were only three other diners, a young man and woman dressed in white tennis clothes who had come straight from the courts—their rackets lay on a nearby chair—and a sad-looking little man in dark clothes who might have been a commercial traveller.

'St Raphaël is surely very quiet just now?' commented Mr Robertson as the waiter brought up the soup.

'It's between seasons', said Marcelle. 'The winter visitors have nearly all gone and the summer holiday-makers haven't arrived.'

Apart from the bottle of *rosé* (pale-red) wine which was served

with it the lunch was more English than French—tomato soup, grilled chops with roast potatoes and green peas, and oranges for dessert, with, of course, plenty of crisp French bread. David and Jean tasted the wine and found it very sweet compared with any of the red wines they had sampled before.

'René says that's because there's so much sun down here', explained Marcelle. 'It makes the grapes too sweet.'

'It could be drier', said Mr Robertson, pouring himself out another glass. 'All the same I wouldn't mind having a large cask of this at home!'

As the meal drew towards its close David and Jean began to fidget. Through a nearby window they could see a fleck of bright blue at the end of the street and they were both dying to get down to it.

'Can't we? Just for five minutes?' begged David.

'Suppose I take them down', suggested Marcelle, rising. 'You could collect the luggage after you've had coffee and then we could meet later at the bus station.'

'Don't you want coffee too?'

'No, I'd rather have a look at the sea. I don't often come down to St Raphaël, you know.' She shepherded the youngsters off before further objections could be made.

'When I was your age I would have simply hated to be so near the sea and not go down to it', she said to Jean as they passed out into the warm sunshine.

As soon as they were out in the street David and Leo gave a whoop and began to run towards the magnetic blue. Jean would have liked to run too, but Marcelle was treating her so much as a grown-up that she felt she had to behave like one, so she made polite conversation instead.

'Is St Raphaël a new town?' she asked, as they walked down between the blocks of tall white buildings which lined the way to the shore.

'Most of it', replied Marcelle. 'René says it was a fishing village originally—you'll see the wall of the harbour when we get down to the beach, and there're some older streets, behind the station—but the greater part consists of villas, hotels, and buildings of that sort which sprang up when it became fashionable to

come to the Riviera for holidays. Most of the Côte d'Azur resorts are like that. The really old town on this part of the coast is Fréjus. You passed through it in the train just before you reached here and you'll see it again on our way to the farm. Fréjus really is old. It goes back to Roman times and there're still lots of Roman ruins there. St Raphaël's only claim to importance, as far as history goes, is that Napoleon, just before he became Emperor, landed here on his way back from Egypt, and fifteen years later was led back this way en route for Elba.'

But by this time they had reached the promenade which ran round the crescent-shaped beach, and history was no longer interesting. David and Leo were already on the beach and Jean could be grown-up no longer.

'Excuse me. I simply must go!' she cried and flew after her brothers, who were standing by the water's edge looking round them with puzzled faces. They had expected the beach, especially on such a fine day, to be crowded, but like the restaurant they had lunched in and the street they had just come down, it was almost deserted. The bathing station was closed. Two children digging in the sand and a single family party enjoying a picnic lunch by the sea-wall were the only signs of life, and the only sounds the strains of an orchestra playing a waltz in a hotel on the promenade and the rhythmic splash of the waves.

'It's queer, isn't it?' said David to Jean as she joined them. 'I feel as if I were trespassing!'

'Yes, so do I, rather', agreed Jean. 'But aren't the colours gorgeous!'

'Not bad at all', admitted David.

'Not bad! They're dazzling!' retorted Jean.

Round the curving bay the white buildings—hotels, restaurants, private villas, some set back in green gardens with palm and orange-trees, others directly on the promenade—gleamed in the bright sun as if they had all been newly white-washed. The sand of the beach was silvery against the sea-wall and yellowish brown near the water's edge. At the western end of the bay, beyond the harbour, the blue water was breaking in white spray over a spit of rock which looked as if it was made of red chalk. The sea itself was a living jewel—far out, a pale misty blue like the sky, rich

THE SEA AND THE HILLS

purple under the red rocks, a deep blue-black near the break-water, and, just before it broke in a lace-fringe of foam on the sand, a lovely, translucent green.

'Wouldn't it be heavenly to swim in', said David, wistfully.

'It would be like bathing in a rainbow', said Jean.

'What's Leo doing?' asked Marcelle, joining them.

Leo was trying to grab something floating in the water, without getting his feet wet, but every time he seemed about to manage it, another wave sent him scurrying back. However, he got it at last and brought it up for their inspection. It was a bunch of fuzzy brown balls, about the size of ping-pong balls.

'Is it some kind of seaweed?' David asked Marcelle.

Marcelle took it in her hand. 'No, that's the seed of the plane-tree—those trees you see planted round the promenade. They're quite bare now, but in summer they're covered with large leaves which give an excellent shade. You'll find plane-trees all over the south of France. In your country, when you want to sit down, you look for a warm place in the sun, but with us it's just the opposite. We're always looking for a shady corner.'

She glanced at her watch. 'And now I really think we must go back', she said, regretfully. 'We mustn't keep Albert waiting too long.'

'Just a minute', said Jean. Crouching down she stretched out her arms and let the waters of the next wave wash over her hands.

'What's that for?' asked David, grinning.

Jean jumped up, clutching a handful of wet sand.

'I don't know', she confessed. 'I just wanted to touch it.'

'Touch what?'

'The Mediterranean.'

'But what for?'

'I don't know, I tell you', said Jean. She always liked to touch things. Touching them made them hers somehow, and now the Mediterranean was hers. As she followed the others from the beach she smoothed out the handful of sand she had caught up. Mixed up with it were tiny pebbles and pieces of broken shells. Shells from the sea that Ulysses sailed. Suddenly she remembered the snowy streets of Paris and the grey ice floating on the lakes of the Bois de Boulogne and it was like remembering a dream.

Could it have been only sixteen hours since they left the Gare de Lyon? It seemed impossible.

The bus took nearly two hours to cover the distance between St Raphaël and the farm, not because it was many miles but because the bus was such an ancient one, because it stopped so often to pick up and set down passengers, and because, the somewhat bedraggled old town of Fréjus with its crowded streets and Roman ruins passed, the road was a regular switchback. Now it climbed laboriously up steep wooded hills, now it plunged abruptly into pleasant cultivated valleys; now it edged its way along narrow shelves on high hillsides, with the dark forest like a wall on the one hand and precipitous gulfs on the other. At first there were many farms, decorative as rock gardens, with terraced fields and substantial red-roofed, green-shuttered houses, but as they mounted higher the intervals between farm and farm lengthened; then, as they passed the highest ridge, the farms grew more frequent again. Women working in the fields, wearing long black dresses and with coloured kerchiefs about their heads, straightened their backs to watch them pass. Goat-herds coming down from the hills with their frisky flocks raised their staffs in salute. Almond and cherry trees were bright in gardens. On a field high above them, sharply outlined against the clear blue sky, they saw men ploughing with teams of red oxen. At a narrow corner on a hill they had to slow up, then stop completely, to let a flock of small, short-woolled sheep go past. Always, wherever they looked, there were hills.

It was a landscape utterly different from the broad and fertile lands of the Rhône Valley and the vivid blues and whites and reds of the coast, but the Robertsons were too tired to enjoy it. They had been travelling for nearly twenty-four hours and were all longing to be at their destination.

'I think I'll sleep for a week after this', said Jean. She simply could not sight-see any more.

'We all will', said Mrs Robertson, as they came over another wooded ridge and began to descend into yet another valley. 'Is it much further, Marcelle?'

'We're nearly there', said Marcelle. 'There's Fayence now.'

THE SEA AND THE HILLS

Looking where she pointed they saw the castellated towers of the village on the ridge of the hills on the far side of the valley. Then a wall of trees cut off the view and two minutes later they drew up at crossroads where Marcelle's husband, René, and Francesco, his Italian worker, were waiting to help them with the luggage.

'There's hot coffee on the stove', René greeted them, 'and we'll have a meal as soon as you've unpacked and washed.'

Grabbing a couple of cases, and with Francesco carrying two more, he led the way up the rough track to the farmhouse, the roof of which could just be seen above the hill.

'Well, I do hope, after all this rush, that we've arrived in time', said David, feelingly, as they passed under the low lintel of the tall white house.

'In time for what?' asked Jean.

'For the spring' said David 'Don't you remember that's what we came here in such a hurry for!'

After some coffee—which tasted queer because it was made with goat's milk—David and Jean went upstairs with their parents to unpack, leaving Leo in the kitchen with Marcelle, who was laying the table for the evening meal, and René, who was stoking up the stove with fir faggots. There was a big pile of these faggots neatly arranged against the wall under the window. The wood was still green and smelt of turpentine.

When the fire was burning to his satisfaction René lit the paraffin pressure lamp which hung from the worm-channelled oak beam running across the low ceiling, then brought in a basket of eggs from a table in the entrance passage and began to wash the eggs at the kitchen tap. When he had washed and dried them all he began to pack the eggs into biscuit-tins, using sawdust to protect them.

'Why do you do that?' asked Leo.

'So that they won't get broken on the way to market', said René.

'Oh, yes. I forgot. You're a poultry farmer, aren't you? Are there a lot of poultry farmers round here?'

'Hardly any. Most of the people up here grow olives. Olives grow well in a poor soil. Better than in a rich one, in fact.'

'Then why don't you grow olives—' specially is that's the name of the farm?' demanded Leo.

THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN FRANCE

René grinned. 'Well, I do have some, you know. About fifty trees. But they're not very good ones. At least they've never given much of a crop while I've been here. Maybe they'll do better this year. It's like that with olives sometimes. You get nothing for years and years and then one year there's such a crop it nearly breaks the branches. But the other fruit trees are very good.'

'I don't suppose', said Leo carelessly, 'I don't suppose there'll be any fruit on the trees just at present?'

'Not on the *trees*', said René solemnly. Then he winked.

'Come along with me'.

Leo followed him, wondering what the wink meant, and René led him into a long dark room behind the kitchen. At first he could see nothing except looming shadows. Then a bolt rasped as René flung open a shutter, and by the reddening evening light Leo saw that he was in a stone-walled storeroom. Agricultural implements and bulging sacks of grain and fertilizer took up one end of it. The other looked like the cellar of a grocery. Standing about the flagged floor or resting on trestles were black casks smelling strongly of wine, and tall earthenware jars used for storing olive oil. There was more wine, red and white, in bulbous 20-litre bottles which sat comfortably in nests of wickerwork on a low platform running under the wall. The wall itself was partially shelved, and the shelves loaded with glass jars filled with pickles and preserved fruits: grapes, cherries, grape-seeds, etc.

'Ooh!' gasped Leo, quite overwhelmed. 'Is it all yours?'

'It's all from the farm', said René.

He climbed up on the platform and brought down a jar, opened it, and fished out a cherry.

'Open your mouth', he commanded.

Leo obeyed and René popped in the cherry, but when Leo tasted the fruit he made a wry face, wriggled, and swallowed quickly.

'Don't you like it?' asked René in surprise.

'It's burning!' gasped Leo, his eyes watering. Not only his mouth was fiery; he could feel the cherry burning all the way down, as if he had swallowed a hot coal.

René laughed. 'That's the brandy it's preserved in. Perhaps it's too strong for you.' He indicated two clothes baskets in a shadowy corner. 'Maybe you'll like these better.'

THE SEA AND THE HILLS

Leo bent over one of the baskets—rather cautiously after his experience with the cherry—then gave a whoop that brought David and Jean flying down to see what had happened to him.

‘What’s the matter? Are you hurt?’ cried Jean.

It is doubtful if Leo heard her. He seemed to be trying to swim in the basket.

‘It’s almonds!’ he cried, joyously throwing up a yellow shower of nuts in his excitement. ‘And the other’s figs! There’s buckets and buckets of them.’

David and Jean looked at each other in amazement.

‘Help yourself’, laughed René. ‘There will be plenty more on the trees later in the year.’

Chapter 7

A PROVENÇAL FARM

'I BELIEVE, I really believe it's going to be the best yet.' It was Jean who spoke, and she did so in the solemn tones of one who having hesitated long has at last come to an important and final conclusion.

'How d'ye mean, best yet?' queried David lazily as he stared up through a fretwork of leaves and twigs at the clear blue of the sky above. There were birds up there. He could hear them chirping and sometimes the flutter of their wings, but no matter how closely he watched he could not see them.

'The best place in France we've been to so far', enlarged Jean. 'Don't you think so, David?'

'It is pretty good', admitted David.

It was a little before noon the following day and brother and sister were sprawling in the shade of a huge oak-tree, still brown with last season's leaves, which crowned a rocky mound a little to the east of and overlooking the terraced fields of Les Olives. During the morning they had been introduced to René's livestock, his goats, hens, and rabbits (which he bred for eating) and had wandered down through the woods on the south side as far as the white boulder bed of the river—there was not one drop of water in it—but the sun was very hot now and they were glad to lie in the shade. In the afternoon they were going to Fayence with their parents and Marcelle.

David gave up trying to see the birds. Rolling over on his stomach, he reached out and plucked a flower like a large violet from a dark cleft between two oak roots. The grass on the farm was thin, dry, and coarse, but wherever the ground was a little moist there were wild flowers—daisies, crocuses, and anemones

A PROVENÇAL FARM

the most common. The flower had no scent. David put it into his mouth and began to chew the thick fleshy stem while, with his chin cupped on his hands, he watched Leo and one of René's goats on a terrace below.

Leo was trying to make friends with the goat but the goat did not feel friendly. Every time Leo came near, it put down its head and charged him, and Leo had to skip backwards while the animal was brought up dancing on the end of its tether. This happened four or five times, and then the goat seemed to tire of the game. It lay down and turned its head away. Leo crept towards it again, then yelled and skipped back as the animal scrambled to its feet and leapt at him. But this time it was the goat's round. The hard bony head caught Leo full in the tummy and he went staggering back till he tripped over a stone and sat down with a bump. The goat bleated triumphantly and fell to browsing again, but Leo continued to sit on the terrace with such a surprised look on his face that Jean and David almost laughed themselves into hysterics.

'It's not funny! It's jolly sore!' Leo shouted at them, indignantly, still sitting. Then scrambling to his feet he gave the goat a nasty look and went clambering up the terrace towards the house, where Marcelle was hanging out some washing between the apple-trees.

David and Jean, still a bit giggly, stretched themselves out in the shade again.

A bee, probably from one of René's hives, buzzed from flower to flower. There was a distant squeaking of fowls from the hen-run where René and Francesco were moving about in a white blizzard of hungry leghorns. The air smelt of pinks and aromatic herbs. The hills were all shades of green and blue.

'I must get up these hills one day', said David, looking at the range above Fayence. 'It'll be good practice for when we go to the real Alps.'

'When do you think we'll go?' he asked suddenly.

'Not for ages and ages', said Jean dreamily. 'I wish we would never go. I wish we could stay here for ever!'

'The Alps might be even nicer', said David, argumentatively. 'How can you know till you've seen both?'

'I know', said Jean, 'so don't talk rubbish, David. How *could* anywhere be nicer than here?'

Les Olives was situated on the slope of one of the hills on the south side of the valley of the Riou Blanc almost directly opposite the village of Fayence. This is one of the most thickly populated regions in the highlands of the department of Var and though David and Jean found quite a number of abandoned houses—long fallen into ruin—in the woods above Les Olives, nearly all the land further down the slope, on the plain crossed by the channel of the White River and on the lower slopes of the hills opposite, was cultivated. Most of the farms were small and of the terraced field sort, similar to those they had seen while driving up from St Raphaël, and now they could examine closely the retaining walls of the terraces Jean and David were filled with admiration for the industry and skill of the people who had made them. No cement was used to hold the heavy blocks of stone together. They were fitted neatly each to each as in the drystone dykes of Scotland and northern England, but instead of being only a few feet high these walls were twice as high as a tall man—and often much higher. Indeed on the very steep slopes, the narrow fields, held in position by the strong walls, were sometimes set so steeply above each other that the peasants who worked them clambered from field to field by means of flights of steps!

'What would happen if the terrace walls were to break?' David wanted to know.

'I suppose—if it was a very steep slope—it might start an avalanche, and olive groves, vineyards, chickens, and goats, and perhaps the farmer too! go tumbling down into the valley', replied René. 'If you look around up in the woods you'll find neglected terraces which have collapsed where the hill has reverted to its natural slope. It's often a tree that causes the fall. The spreading roots gradually push out the stones and once two or three have gone the whole wall collapses very easily.'

Most of the people in the valley, René told them, owned their farms and houses—substantial stone buildings of two and sometimes three storeys. The red roofs (usually with only one slope, like

A PROVENÇAL FARM

the roof of a lean-to shed) had three layers of heavy tiles, and were further weighted by big stones to keep them secure against the *mistral*, a strong wind that sometimes sweeps down from the mountains.

'Though the peasants here are supposed to be poor (and it's true they don't have much money), if they work hard, as most of them do, they can live very well on their own produce', said René. 'They sometimes grumble a bit—who doesn't?—but on the whole they have rather a happy life, and know how to enjoy themselves.'

'They certainly look happy', said Jean. 'We heard people singing in the fields when we were coming up here and nearly everybody you meet smiles and speaks to you and cracks a joke.'

'That's the southern temperament', said René, grinning.

'But if people live so well here, why are there so many abandoned farms?' objected David. 'And why don't more people come from the cities?'

'Well, of course there are disadvantages', admitted René. 'As you must have noticed, though the houses are big and well-built, most of them are pretty primitive, and there's one really big drawback to farming here—the lack of water. A water-tap is a luxury outside the villages—and not all the houses in the villages have them by a long way! Many of the people there have to get their water from communal fountains and pumps, while out here in the country most families have to wind up their water bucketful by bucketful from deep wells—very hard work I can tell you! especially as they may have to draw water not only for house use but to water the garden and even the fields in dry weather.'

'Aren't there any streams?' asked Jean.

'Yes, there are a few but not nearly enough. And where there is one each farmer through whose fields it runs is only allowed to use its water for a short time each day. Otherwise there wouldn't be enough to go round.'

'Then, of course, there's neither gas nor electricity in most houses', he added. 'And as for baths, sanitation, and so on——' he shrugged his shoulders. 'We live like our ancestors!'

'You don't', said Mr Robertson. 'You've got water in the house, at least. And sanitation.'

'That's true. One of the first things I did when I came here was to install plumbing and a petrol-driven pump which lifts water from the well to the house cistern and the tank in the hen-run, but as you can see we're still using paraffin lamps and stoves for light and cooking. In some of the houses round about they haven't even a grate to cook on. They still cook their meals in a sort of witch's cauldron slung over a wood fire built on the open hearth. That's all there was at Les Olives when we came. Very picturesque but not very convenient!'

'I should say not!' said Mrs Robertson, emphatically. 'Even oil stoves are a nuisance.'

'Yes, they're far from ideal. Still, we couldn't have done better till now. If we get a good price for olives this year—and if the hens keep on laying—I may be able to afford an electric installation. I think I could drive a dynamo off the engine that works the pump.'

'Where does the electricity in Fayence come from?' asked Mrs Robertson.

'From a hydro-electric works up in the mountains. But the cable doesn't come any further south than the village on this route. If it did everything would be easy.'

René had not always been a farmer. He had been born in Nice and trained as an engineer, but he had always wanted to live in the country, and when after the liberation he returned to France from Germany, where he had been held as a prisoner of war, he had looked around until he found Les Olives. He had been able to buy it cheaply because the olive-trees were in poor shape, and because, as in Britain, there is in France a drift from the countryside into the big cities.

'Whereas you wanted to drift the other way!' said Mr Robertson.

'That's right', nodded René, 'and I'm not the only one, you know. Nearly all Frenchmen have a hankering for a bit of land of their own, and even those who deliberately leave the countryside can't forget it. As soon as they've saved up enough money or are pensioned off from their city job, back they go to their old villages. Even to-day more than forty per cent. of Frenchmen are countrymen.'

Chapter 8

THE UNEXPECTED RIVER

FOR the next three weeks—weeks in which they all grew richly suntanned, for it did not rain once during all their stay—the Robertsons lazed about Les Olives, going in the afternoons for short excursions up and down the valley, visiting Fayence, St Paul, and other villages within walking distance, and making one longer trip (travelling by bus from Fayence) to Draguignan, the *chef-lieu*, or administrative centre, of the Var Department. They went to Draguignan because Mr Robertson wanted to visit the library, but this trip was a disappointment to the youngsters.

‘What I can’t understand is why they made it *chef-lieu*’, said David as they walked back to the station. ‘St Raphaël would have been more like it.’

‘St Raphaël was only a fishing village when France was broken up into Departments’, said his mother. ‘Besides, the chief place, or administrative centre, of a department isn’t chosen for its looks. It’s chosen for convenience. Draguignan may not be an exciting place but it’s an excellent centre.’

But David and Jean remained unconvinced.

‘I’d have made Fayence *chef-lieu*’, said Jean,

Fayence was the little town on the hill across the valley from the farm. Two or three times a week David and Jean strapped on rucksacks and walked over there to buy bread, meat, and anything else Marcelle required for the household, and they would willingly have made the journey every day, for there was always something new to be seen on the road and Fayence itself enchanted them.

Perched on the crest and upper slopes of a hill of almost precipitous steepness, with its tall, red-roofed, pink, white, and primrose-walled tenements, its bridge-houses, which were built right over the

THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN FRANCE

roadways, its battlements, courts, tower, and cliff gardens, it was a town in a fairy tale. Not one of its streets was regular and none level for more than a few yards at a time. Now the buildings stood back and there was an open space bright with sunlight. Now the houses closed in and there was a shadowy bottleneck through which it would have required care to guide a wheelbarrow.

Set deep in the thick walls were low dark doors studded with great nails and strengthened with bands of iron. Blue-shadowed archways gave glimpses of interior courts with flowers and shrubs in painted tubs and perhaps a tiny black donkey, with basket panniers slung across its back, nibbling guiltily at the foliage. From the two principal streets narrow cobbled alleys dived suicidally down or twisted mysteriously up, and more than half the ways in the town were not streets at all but stairs. There were stairs everywhere: broad shallow stairs on which anyone climbing took two steps on for each up; steep narrow stairs that climbed up almost perpendicularly. There were stairs in the gardens and stairs in the courtyards. Even the main street where most of the shops were situated and which wriggled its way up the hill from the Auto-Rail station near the Co-operative Vinery was only a street for three-quarters of the way. Above the rocky platform where the old grey-brown church stood like an ornament on a mantelpiece over the gulf of the valley, it flung up its cobbles in despair, gave up completely, and reached the main *Place* where the women washed their clothes by a splashing fountain shaded by old trees by a flight of steps. Above the *Place* yet more steps mounted towards the hill-top between the green-shuttered houses.

The inhabitants of Fayence, too, had a fairy-tale quality. The laughing washerwomen; the wrinkled dames in billowing black skirts and huge boots who chattered with the fruit-seller in the narrow alley by the old church; the schoolboys in black frock-like aprons chasing each other about the stairs; the blue-bloused artisans; the little bent cobbler, peering out from his dark workshop through steel-rimmed glasses; the village baker, standing at the bakery door, beating white clouds from his chest with his large strong hands, drawing deep breaths, and calling to the women at the fountain, 'Ah c'est bon! C'est du bon air!'—all

THE UNEXPECTED RIVER

these were straight out of the pages of Perrault, the Frenchman who first collected and wrote down the traditional fairy tales, Cinderella, Red Riding Hood, and the rest. In short, Fayence was the sort of town that all children dream about and every time David and Jean went there they had to tear themselves away, or risk being benighted on their way home. Not that being caught out by the sunset mattered except that it gave extra work to Marcelle and their mother. Walking home through the moonlit woods was fun and there was no danger provided they kept to the tracks. To leave the tracks in the darkness *was* dangerous, for often near the ruins of abandoned farmhouses there were old well-shafts. The wells were usually dry, but some, in spite of all the debris that had tumbled into them, were still deep. To have blundered into one in the dark would have been no joke, and as David and Jean were sensible they took no chances. They wanted adventures but not that kind. Once, on their way home from Fayence, they did have an adventure. When they reached the bank of the river at their usual crossing-place, about a mile below the bridge on the Grasse road, they found their way home barred by a rushing flood. The White River had risen at last!

'I suppose it really is our river?' said Jean, as they stood in amazement among the clumps of prickly juniper bushes and Spanish broom, gazing down on this unexpected barrier.

'Must be', said David. 'Look, there's the old farmhouse they call Les Turquières up the hill there and we've got Fayence and the ruined château at Tourette, that looks a bit like the Moscow Kremlin, right behind.'

'Then it must have started running while we were in Fayence. I suppose it's the flood water from a storm in the mountains just reaching here. There wasn't a drop in it when we crossed the bridge earlier in the day.'

'Not a drop', confirmed David. 'Don't you remember we saw sheep in the channel, sheltering from the sun under the arch of the bridge.' He looked up at the sky. 'It'll be dark in half an hour. We'll be awfully late if we go round by the bridge, and they wanted to have dinner early to-night.'

'Oh well, we can't help it', said Jean ruefully. 'Come on, let's get started.' She eased a strap of her rucksack, which was cutting

into her shoulder, and was making to go back to the road, when David called her.

'I say, Jean, let's try to ford it!'

'It looks awfully fast, and if we fall in all the food will be wasted', Jean objected.

'Oh, don't be sticky. We won't fall, and it can't be so very deep.'

Sitting down under a juniper bush David began to unbuckle his sandals, and after a moment Jean followed his example. When they had the sandals off they tucked them into their rucksacks to leave their hands free, then, rather gingerly, David stepped out into the racing water.

'Gosh, it's icy', he cried, then added, 'Aren't you coming?'

Jean hesitated. But if David could do it so could she. She stepped into the racing stream and, like David, cried out at its coldness. But the cold was nothing to the pull of the current. It was like trying to walk with someone clinging to her ankles and, to add to her difficulties, the weight of the rucksack made her frightfully top-heavy. But she took her time, and though she floundered once to the waist, she kept her balance.

'Come on, you're doing fine!' David applauded, and a minute later, dripping but triumphant, they were sitting on the turf of the further bank, strapping on their sandals.

'Well, that's the first time I've gone bathing with my shirt on', David chuckled as he squeezed some of the water from his clothes. 'I say, won't Leo be envious when he hears what he's missed!'

'If Leo had been with us he might have been drowned', said Jean soberly. She gave her numbed legs another slap to set the blood flowing, then slung on her rucksack. It was a bit wet but the bread seemed to be all right.

'Are you ready?' she asked, then burst out laughing.

'What's the matter?' demanded David astonished.

'You're steaming!'

'So are you for that matter!'

It was true. The air was so warm that their damp clothes were giving off curling threads of vapour. 'Well, we shan't catch cold, anyway', she said.

'No, but we'll catch something else from the honourable

parents if we don't hurry up', said David, and still dripping and steaming they set off for Les Olives.

'During these weeks there was a new fruit tree in blossom every morning. When they arrived, only the almonds and a few cherries were in bloom. Before they left, pear and apple, apricot and peach, were all beginning to blossom and adding their scent to air sweet with the perfume of violets and aromatic herbs. One morning Marcelle drew their attention to a cluster of minute, greeny flower-buds on the climbing vine which clambered above the ground-floor windows—flowers that would later in the year become a rich grape cluster. Another day they found new shoots on the field vines. There were lambs in the field near the river and goat-kids on the terraces. The cicadas, those Provençal grasshoppers whose whirring call is the very signature tune of the French South, began to make themselves heard at mid-day. And every day it was warmer. Sometimes at noon the blue of the sky looked incandescent, and by the brilliant light every object, every flower, stone, tree, and animal was sharply defined and solidly three-dimensional. Nor were the colours only a surface brilliance. They had the appearance of depth. The dark twisted trunks of old olive-trees looked as if they were black to the heart of the wood. The petals of pear blossom looked as if made of thick wax. Leaves on trees and shrubs, whether tenderly translucent or glossily dark, were obviously green through and through. Nothing was suggested. Everything was fully bodied forth. Jean spent hours trying to get the effect of the landscape with water-colours, and failed completely. However thickly she spread her paints her sketches remained pale and flat compared with the reality.

'None of the colours I have are bright enough', she complained ruefully when her father inquired about her progress. 'What you need here is *luminous* paint.'

Mr Robertson laughed. 'That's an idea, Jean. You should try it. Perhaps you'll start a new school!'

'Oh, I don't think I'll bother', yawned Jean, easing herself down on the grass. 'You don't really need to *do* anything here. Living's enough!'

'Will we be staying here much longer?' she asked presently.

THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN FRANCE

'We're going at the end of the week.'

That woke Jean up.

'This week? You mean we're leaving here this week?'

'That's what I said. That letter that came this morning was from Paris. Your grandmother's coming down on Saturday and as there isn't room for her at Les Olives without putting René and Marcelle to a great deal of inconvenience, she suggests we join her at Cannes.'

'But Daddy, we haven't been to Grasse yet!' Jean protested.

'That's easily mended. We can go to Grasse on the way to Cannes. There's a bus connection with the auto-rail from Fayence. We could leave here on Friday, stay a night in Grasse, and travel down to Cannes the following day. How would that suit?'

Jean considered the suggestion glumly.

'I suppose it would be all right', she said at last.

Mr Robertson squinted at her over his glasses. 'You don't seem very enthusiastic. Don't you want to go swimming?'

'Oh yes, very much. It's just that I like it here, too', she added, and Mr Robertson groaned.

'What a girl you are for putting down roots! Wherever you go you have to be torn away. I'll wager you'll feel just the same about Cannes after we've been there a couple of days. Now beetle along and see what your mother thinks of the Grasse plan.'

Chapter 9

IN THE LAND OF FLOWERS

ON the day they journeyed to Grasse the weather broke. Rain dashed against the windows of the motor coach before they were out of sight of Fayence, and their fellow passengers wore their jackets and coats buttoned and complained of the cold. The Robertsons did not feel cold but they missed the sun.

'Just when we want it to shine most of all!' complained David eyeing the raindrops trickling down the pane with disgust. 'It won't be much fun swimming in this.'

'Don't worry, David. It won't last', said Mrs Robertson, reassuringly, and even as she spoke they ran out of the storm. Only for a moment, however. Soon clouds covered the sky again, and in the fields and villages along the line they saw men and women running for shelter as another shower swept down from the mountains. When about half-way they changed buses for the last stage of the journey it was in a downpour.

'Well, maybe the rain doesn't last here, Mother', chuckled David, as they ducked thankfully under cover. 'But it certainly doesn't waste any time when it is falling!'

In the bus they had a strange experience. For the first quarter of an hour or so, as they climbed up into the hills, they were unable to see much of the wooded country for the rain, but later the rain stopped and they began to run in and out of patches of mist. Sometimes they were in the mist and could see no further than the verge of the road. Sometimes the mist was above them, a grey cloud on the hillside into which drenched armies of pines and fir-trees marched and vanished. Sometimes as they drove along roads above deep narrow valleys, the mist was below—billowing grey puffs and streamers which changed shape continually

and broke like waves when they were driven against the forested slopes.

'Don't they look just like sky-clouds!' exclaimed Leo flattening his nose against the window-pane to look down more easily. 'Look at that one! It's shaped exactly like a cloud.'

Mrs Robertson smiled. 'They are clouds, Leo.'

'Not really, Mother?' David was incredulous.

'Yes, really. We're very high now, you know.'

'Gosh!' David was immensely tickled. 'Fancy driving up into the clouds in a motor-bus!'

'I wish they would go away', said Jean, fretfully. 'I want to see the flower gardens.'

But the famous flower gardens where the peasants of this district cultivate fields not of cabbages and turnips but of roses and violets, lavender, carnations and jasmine, were invisible. Once looming through the mist, Jean saw a purplish glow that might have been a great mound of violets, and now and then a dark cypress-tree or a white house loomed out of the obscurity, but that was all, and the higher they mounted the thicker the mist grew. Then the houses began to be frequent. Hooters sounded. Private cars, some with fog lamps lit, streamed past. A coloured poster inviting them to '*Visitez la Parfumerie*' leapt at them, and then all at once they were among houses and shops and the traffic of a town that at first sight looked not unlike St Raphaël, but which, as they were to discover later, was very different.

'Time to get off', said Mr Robertson, rising as the bus drew up on a little square. 'This is Grasse.'

René had recommended a hotel close to the bus terminus. It was a tall stone building with high narrow windows. A maid with frizzy black hair and dark Italian eyes showed them to their rooms, and while her mother unpacked, Jean went to the window, rubbed a clear space on the misted pane, and peered out. The window looked down on the busy boulevard, and beyond, looming hazily through the mist, she could see a hint of crooked gables and flattish red roofs.

'Is that the old town down there?' she asked, turning to her mother.

Mrs Robertson joined her at the window. 'Yes, that's the old

town. The real Grasse. What a pity it's misty. I believe we could see the cathedral from this window if it was clear.'

'Why's it so much busier than St Raphaël?' asked Jean, looking down at the traffic. 'Because it's later in the season now?'

'Partly', agreed Mrs Robertson. 'Though Grasse is a fairly busy town all the year round. It's on one of the two main roads north from this part of the Mediterranean—the Route Napoleon it's called because Napoleon travelled this way after his escape from Elba. Then it's not just a holiday place. It's a famous health resort—especially for people with weak chests. Besides all that it has a big working population—all the people employed at the Perfumeries. There are other factories too', she added.

'Oh?' Jean sounded dubious.

Mrs Robertson smiled. She knew what Jean was thinking—that Grasse, when the mist cleared, might turn out to be as drab as the industrial towns of Scotland and England.

'Don't worry, Jean. They're fruit-preserving factories!'

There was a thump at the door. It was David.

'Aren't you ever coming down to eat?' he demanded.

'Is Daddy ready?'

'He's downstairs waiting. I say, Mother, there's lots of people in this hotel. It's not a bit like the restaurant at St Raphaël. There're Americans, Germans—at least maybe they're Swiss but they're talking German—and lots of French.'

'All right, David. Tell Daddy we'll be down directly.'

During the meal the mist began to lift. When they came out of the hotel the sun, circled by a giant halo, was visible through a golden haze. Waiters were mopping the damp from the red tables and chairs set out at the doors of their cafés. Gaily striped sun awnings were being pulled down over other shop windows. The people in the streets were stripping off their raincoats. Mixed with the smell of petrol fumes was a fresh cool scent of vegetation.

'Doesn't it smell nice!' exclaimed Leo, sniffing.

'Yes, there isn't any need to go to the *parfumeries* for sweet scents', agreed Mrs Robertson.

'But we are going, aren't we?' asked Jean, anxiously.

'Yes, later. But let's take a little walk first. If the mist lifts at this rate we'll see the sea soon.'

THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN FRANCE

'Can you see the sea from here?' David was surprised.

'Easily, it's just down below.' Mrs Robertson waved her hand in the direction of the hazy outlines of the cathedral tower, then led the way east along the Boulevard past its juncture with the Route Napoleon till they came out on a terrace fronted by a balustrade, beyond which was a narrow cactus garden. The terrace was clear of mist, but beyond the prickly spears of the cactuses the vapours were streaming upwards, like smoke from a fire, and all behind was hidden, till suddenly, with the effect of a theatre curtain rising on a brilliantly lit scene, the whole body of the mist swept up, and a magnificent view, over the roofs of the lower town, down over miles of gardens and farms to the cornflower blue of the sea by Cannes, was suddenly revealed. The children were so surprised that for a moment they could only stand staring, then David broke the silence with a shrill whistle.

'Whew! Fancy that being there all the time and we never knew!'

'Can we go down?' asked Leo, eagerly.

'Down where?' asked his mother.

'Down to the sea—I want to bathe!'

'You'll have to wait, Leo. It's twelve miles away.'

'As much as that', exclaimed Jean. 'You'd think you could throw a stone into it from here!'

'That's because we're so high', explained her mother. 'Never mind, Leo. We'll go down there to-morrow. And now shall we go to one of the Perfumeries?'

But David was looking longingly up the hill behind, where gardens and wooded heights were materializing as the mist cloud swept on up the hill.

'Couldn't we go for a walk instead?' he suggested. 'It's so nice now, it's a shame to go into a factory.'

'I feel the same', confessed his father. 'Let's separate, shall we? David and I can take a walk up the Route Napoleon—if he could climb that hill so can we!—and we can meet again at the hotel.'

This compromise suited everyone, so at the next corner they broke up and while David and his father went plodding up the steep hill to the right, Mrs Robertson, Jean, and Leo returned through the shopping centre, and rounding the Casino, made their way to a nearby *parfumerie*.

Though there was nothing except its signboard to indicate what was manufactured in the perfumery there was no mistaking it. The very street outside smelt of flowers. Crossing a little courtyard they entered the arched doorway, where the hatch of the reception desk was thrown up and a clerk inquired their business.

'Are we in time to see round?' asked Mrs Robertson.

'*Mais certainement, Madame*', said the girl. 'There's a party going round now, but if you will wait a few minutes the guide will come for you'. Leaving her desk, she showed them into a comfortable waiting-room where two elderly American ladies, whom they had seen in the hotel dining-room, were already waiting, and five minutes later, the guide, a plump jolly-looking girl with a flashing gold tooth, gleaming gold curls, and a bright smile, came in. She spoke with a curious, rather pleasant half French, half American accent.

As preliminary to taking them round she gave them a brief account of the history and extent of the Grasse Perfume Industry. Perfume, she told them, had been made in Grasse for hundreds of years. According to some accounts it was Catherine de Medici who had first encouraged the industry, but it was probably even older than that, and one authority on Provence maintained that in the twelfth century the Grasse Perfumeries supplied not only France but all Italy and Spain with scented soap—still an important product of the factories. The real fame of the Perfumeries, however, rested on their perfumes. Every year about ten billion jasmine flowers, three million pounds of rose petals, and four million pounds of orange blossom were consumed by the Perfumeries. It took no less than five tons of rose petals to make one kilo (approximately two pounds) of concentrated rose essence, and fully 62,000 acres of land in the neighbourhood of Grasse were now devoted entirely to flower-growing.

'You don't think of that when you put a drop behind your ear, eh?' she ended with a chuckle.

'I suppose it's in the summer time that you're busiest', said one of the American ladies.

'Well, yes, that's true', agreed the guide. 'But then it's summer most of the year here!' she added with another huckle. 'At least, there nearly always is some flower to be harvested; violets in

February and March—it's violets we're working on now but I guess you can smell 'em—hyacinths and jonquils in March and April; roses, orange blossom, and mignonette in May and June; jasmine from July on, and tuberoses in August and September. Then by the time they're finished the violets are coming on again.'

'And now, ladies and gennulman', she concluded, 'Mustn't forget the gentlemen', she added, flashing Leo a specially brilliant smile—'If you'll come along with me I'll show you how it's done. This way, ladies and gentleman. *Par ici s'il-vous plait!*'

The room into which the guide now led them was lined from ceiling to floor with racks of shallow trays.

'There are two main ways of extracting the scent from flowers', explained the guide. 'One way we use heat, but that's too complicated to go into here. The other way's what we call the cold method.' She went to one of the racks and drew out a tray. 'You see this frame?'

'It's like a small picture-frame', said Jean.

'That's right, Mademoiselle', beamed the guide. 'That's just what it is like—a bit deeper perhaps, but otherwise exactly like a picture-frame with glass and all. Well then, this is what we do. We take this frame and we cover the glass on each side about an inch thick with beef fat and——'

'Just ordinary beef fat?' interrupted Mrs Robertson.

'Just ordinary beef fat, Madame', nodded the guide. 'Just ordinary beef fat like you get on the back of a beef-steak—when you get a beef-steak! Well then, as I said, we cover the glass with this fat, see, then we lay the flowers on the fat and we keep changing the flowers every day, and after we've done this for some months the fat is impregnated with the perfume. Then all we've got to do is extract it by distillation.'

'If the fat absorbs the perfume of the flowers, won't it absorb, well any other—er perfume about?' asked the second American.

The guide put down the frame, folded her hands, pursed her lips, and nodded solemnly.

'Now that, ladies and gennulman, is what I call a highly intelligent question. Yes, lady, it would. It certunly would! Now garlic, see. Nobody that works here is allowed to eat garlic!

That's a sacrifice, isn't it? Fancy not being allowed to eat garlic!' She reached for another frame. 'I hope no lady or gennulman here's been eating garlic?' she asked with a twinkle. No one had been eating garlic. 'Well then, look at this now. The other frame was empty. This is a working frame and you can see the fat. There are no flowers, for this was a rose frame.'

She held out the frame to Jean and as the latter put her head towards it it was like breathing in the perfume of a bunch of fresh-cut roses.

'Smells nice, huh?' said the guide.

'It's lovely', said Jean.

'Go on, little gennulman, you smell it too', encouraged the guide. But Leo hung back.

'Go on, Leo, don't be silly', said Mrs Robertson, and finally, still reluctant, he took a quick sniff.

'The gennulman doesn't seem to care for perfume much', laughed the guide. 'Never mind, wait till you're grown, maybe you'll feel different.' She replaced the tray on the rack.

'And now, ladies and gennulman, if there's no more questions—'.

From the frame room the guide took them to the department where the perfume essence was extracted from the fat by a distillation process similar to that by which brandy is extracted from wine, and from there into the showroom where samples of the various kinds of perfumes, soaps, cosmetics, and other products of the perfumery were displayed.

Mrs Robertson bought a flask of lavender water and a box of soap tablets, and Jean a tiny phial of rose perfume.

'Would you like anything, Leo?' asked Mrs Robertson, but Leo shook his head. He had been very subdued during the latter part of the tour and now the expianation came out.

'Mummy!'

'Yes, Leo? Goodness! You do look serious! Don't you feel well?'

'No. It's not that', said Leo. 'But Mummy, there's a lady going to smell *very* peculiar one day.'

'What *do* you mean?' asked Mrs Robertson.

'It wasn't my fault', said Leo defensively. 'I tried ~~not~~ to, but

THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN FRANCE

you remember how the guide asked me to smell the flowers in the tray?"

'Yes, of course.'

'Well, I had a bit of butterscotch in my mouth when she asked me and I simply *couldn't* help breathing on it!'

Chapter 10

ON THE BLUE COAST

IN the morning there was just time for a quick round of the narrow twisting streets of old Grasse and a glance at the Cathedral which raised its square tower from the very heart of the labyrinth, before they joined the bus for Cannes. It was crowded with travellers, most of them carrying bathing-wraps or beach bags, and David and Jean had to strap-hang; but the journey was a short one. The coach swooped down the steep hill between the flower gardens like a diver down a bathing pool shute and they seemed no sooner out of Grasse than they were among houses again—first, neat comfortable villas set in carefully tended gardens with rockeries and fruit-trees, then Cannes proper with its English architecture and, as they drew up in front of the station, its babble of English voices.

‘Portah! Portah!’ cried a man with a red face and military moustache, leaning out of a dusty daimler. ‘I say, Portah!’

A little girl in a flowered beach-suit and a floppy white hat beating at her mother’s arm with sun-reddened fingers. ‘Mummy! Mummy! Aren’t we going to the sands, Mummy?’

Bronzed young men in white flannels and blazers looking like film actors; pretty girls in tennis shorts, swinging rackets in their hands, looking like film actresses; golfers and bathers; new arrivals, their faces pallid beside those of the residents, looking up at the hotel signs; chauffeurs from the luxury hotels at the beach looking out for clients. ‘Par ici, Madame; par ici!’

‘And so I said to Robert. “Robert”, I said. “Ruin us or not I simply must have some sunshine”; and so here I am!’

‘. . . such a funny little café near the bandstand, my dear!’

Touring cars piled high with trunks and bags. Bicycles and motor-cycle combinations. A smell of exhaust gases.

'Portah! Portah!'

'Mummy. Oh Mummy, will you listen to me, Mummy!'

As she stood on the crowded square outside the station while David and her father helped a porter with their luggage, which they were parking in the left-luggage office, Jean looked and listened in amazement.

'We might be in Brighton!'

Mrs Robertson nodded. 'It is English, isn't it? But then, you know, Cannes *is* an English town. The French even make jokes about it being a British possession!'

'But why?'

'Well, curiously, it all began because of an outbreak of plague: cholera, to be exact. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when wealthy English people went abroad for winter holidays, the great majority of them went to Italy, but in 1834 there was an outbreak of cholera in the south of France and among the travellers held up here by the quarantine laws was that same Lord Brougham who gave his name to a wheeled carriage. Lord Brougham, an important political and social figure of the times, was probably very angry at having his holiday upset, but before the travel ban was lifted he had fallen so deeply in love with the scenery and climate of Cannes (it was only a tiny fishing village then), that he built himself a house here and talked so enthusiastically about the region when he went back to England that many of his fashionable friends followed his example. In time wintering at Cannes became the vogue and it remained so until well into the thirties. Kings and queens, dukes, duchesses and premiers, millionaires, famous actors and film stars—all the people that the gossip-writers of the newspapers are interested in came to Cannes for winter holidays then, and many of them do so still.'

'And it all began because of the cholera!'

'All because of the cholera. If it had not been for that the Riviera might still be a place of sleepy little fishing villages.'

'Well, that's that', said Mr Robertson, rejoining them. He looked at his watch. 'We've got about an hour before your

mother arrives. Let's see if we can find rooms. We could try the Pension Rouget again.'

The Pension Rouget—the equivalent of an English boarding-house—was in a quiet, narrow street behind the Rue d'Antibes, Cannes's busiest shopping centre, and they were able to engage comfortable rooms on the third floor without difficulty.

'There's no view,' said Mrs Robertson, 'but that won't matter, as we'll be out most of the time.'

From the *Pension* they returned to the bustle of the station just as Madame Draguille's train steamed in, and two hours later, meetings and greetings over, a meal taken at a nearby restaurant, the youngsters, free at last, were hurrying to the beach for their first bathe. It seemed that all Cannes had the same idea. Gaily-hued bathing wraps flapped at every corner. Spade-brandishing children raced and screamed. Glossy sports cars hooted their way through the coloured throng. Then the wide arc of the promenade opened before them, backed by glittering hotel buildings. Beyond were waving palm-trees, the crowded yellow sands, the brightness of the sea, where dozens of bathers were already splashing, and white-sailed yachts were leaning to the breeze.

'Bet I'm in first!' wagered David as he wriggled out of his clothes in the shelter of his bathing-wrap.

'Bet you aren't', retorted Jean and tossing her wrap over his head, darted off down the beach. They splashed into the surf together.

'Wait for me!' wailed Leo, in distress. He was in trouble with a knotted shoulder strap. Finally he gave up the struggle and ran holding up his costume with one hand. David and Jean, wet faces aglow with pleasure, came breasting in on a long surge to meet him.

'Here I come!' cried Leo joyously and plunged head-first at a huge wave. It tumbled him and he came up feet first. When David saw his brother's feet he gave a yell.

'Leo, you silly ass!'

'Wass-a-matter?' demanded Leo, spouting water.

'You're still wearing your sandals.'

'Am I?' said Leo. He looked down at his feet through the foam and swirling sand. 'Oh well, I can't get them much wetter than they are now!' he said, philosophically. 'Take me out', he begged.

'Well, just once. Come on, Jean.'

David and Jean crouched down and Leo took a grip of their shoulders.

'All right. I'm ready!'

Swimming breast-stroke and keeping in line they towed him out for about twenty yards then turned and swam parallel to the shore. A young man and woman, burnt brown as Indians, churned past them, swimming strongly straight out to sea. Then there was a shrill cry of 'Attention!' and a red canoe, paddled by pink monsters with staring black sun-glass eyes, bore down on them and turned aside just in time. Round the curve of the bay the many-storeyed hotels glittered like giant bride-cakes.

'Wizard, isn't it?' gasped David.

'Lovely! Water's quite warm, too. Heaps warmer than at home, even in August.'

'You all right, Leo?' Jean asked presently.

'I think', said Leo carefully, 'I think maybe I should go ashore now, Jean.'

'You're not feeling cold, are you?' asked David, scornfully.

'No, not cold,' said Leo. 'But I think maybe, if I don't go in, my bathing costume's going to slip right off!'

Next day was Palm Sunday and as they were on their way to the beach they saw the local children, very stiff and starchy in their Sunday best, making their way to church carrying what looked like large lollipops ornamented with ribbons and bows. The older people had sprigs of greenery to symbolize palm branches.

'Are they really lollipops, Grandmère?' asked Leo, staring.

Madame Draguille laughed. 'The *rameau*? In a way they are, I suppose. Only it's not toffee on the top of the stick, Leo. It's preserved fruits—apricots, cherries, sometimes a small orange or peach, sometimes an assortment.'

'But why are they taking them to church?' asked Jean.

ON THE BLUE COAST

'To be blessed by the priest. They eat them afterwards, of course. It's only in the south of France that they have this custom. In the other regions the children take palms, like their parents. Look! There's a lady over there carrying some. They're not real palm branches, of course. Those would be far too big. What the lady over there has is a sprig of a shrub called *buis*, a sort of box-wood. After the ceremony the people, if they are practising Catholics, take the "palms" home, hang them on the wall, beside the crucifix if they have one, and keep them there until another Palm Sunday comes round and they get fresh ones. It's rather a pretty custom, don't you think?'

'I suppose it's only the Catholics who keep it up?' said Jean.

'That's right, but then as you know, nearly everyone in France belongs to the Catholic Church—if they belong to any. There were once quite big Protestant communities here in the south, though', she added.

After their bathe, leaving Mr and Mrs Robertson reading on the sands, the youngsters went along the shore with Madame Draguille to visit the harbour and the old town, passing on their way a grove of the tallest palms they had seen so far. Some boys of Leo's age were playing cricket in the shade beneath, using one of the woolly-looking trunks as a wicket.

'Aren't they whoppers!' cried David looking up one of the dark columns at the heavy green fronds waving gently above. 'I wouldn't like to have to carry one of them to church', he chuckled.

'I wish I had a *rameau* that size, though!' said Leo greedily.

'Are palms native to France, Grandmère?' asked Jean. 'I thought they only grew in Africa and other really hot places?'

'There is one palm, a dwarf one, which is native here,' Madame Draguille replied, 'but you're perfectly right, Jean. Most of the palms you see here have been imported. Indeed nearly all the trees you see on the Riviera are importations, even the olives, and the vines!'

'Not really?'

'Yes. It is surprising, isn't it? And though oranges, lemons,

prickly-pear trees, cypresses, and fig-trees all grow well, none of these are native either.'

'Then what did grow here originally?' asked David. 'There must have been something.'

'Botanists say it was nearly all pine-trees. But see, here we are in old Cannes. That tall grey tower up there was built by the monks from the Lérin Islands at least six centuries ago—probably more.'

'What d'you call those hills across the bay?' asked David. 'They look quite steep—and aren't they a deep red. Like flower-pots!'

'That's the Esterel Range, and the red patches are precipices of porphyry. At this time of morning, with the sun shining, you see them as red and green, but as the sun goes down they turn the most wonderful colours, sometimes violet, sometimes a deep dark blue, sometimes the colour of old gold.'

In the large sheltered harbour about a dozen yachts and some fishing boats were lying at anchor, and by the quayside a fisherman sat on a coil of rope mending a torn net. Behind, above the water, was a picturesque *place* dotted with plane-trees and bounded on three sides by old houses, little *bistros*, and small ship-chandlers, which sold fishing tackle and boating gear. Under the faded awning in front of a *bistro*, a second fisherman in a baggy blue jersey, his red stockings showing over the tops of his boots, was playing at dominoes with an old man who had a ragged white beard. Each had a glass of wine, which he sipped slowly as he studied his pieces, and each, when he had selected a domino, put it on the table with the solemnity of a Bishop laying a foundation-stone. A few yards away a little girl with bright black eyes and long, tangled, dark hair sat on a worn doorstep singing softly to her doll. From open windows above came the sound of crockery being washed up. The blue-green water lapped at the quay wall.

'Well, what do you think of this part, Jean?' asked Madame Draguille. 'It's pretty, isn't it?'

'It makes all the rest of the town look as if it were made of cardboard and silver paper!'

Madame Draguille laughed. 'Modern Cannes does look rather

like the setting for a musical comedy. Still, it's an amusing comedy!

'There's a boat coming in', said David.

It was a small steamboat.

'That's the boat from the Iles des Lérins', said Madame Draguille. 'Quite a lot of people stay on Ste Marguerite, and of course, many visitors go out to visit the fort there and the monastery buildings on St Honorat. We might visit them too one day. And now, let's go back and join your parents, shall we?'

At the corner of the *place* Jean looked back for a moment. The little girl still sat in the sun rocking her doll. The old man playing dominoes under the blue and white striped awning of the *bistro* laid his last piece with a flourish, sat back, folded his arms and eyed his antagonist triumphantly. The fisherman sitting by the quay dragged his net together and, bundling it over his shoulder, rolled off into the shadows.

Chapter 11

STRAIGHT OUT OF 'THE CHOCOLATE SOLDIER' !

THE days at Cannes passed quickly. Early in the week Mr Robertson phoned to Nice to inquire about the motor-coach service to the Alps, and, much to David's delight, booked seats for two Saturdays ahead, when Madame Draguille would be returning to Paris. But meanwhile they were very happy where they were. David, Jean, and Leo went bathing at least once every day. They visited the flower market near the harbour. Jean and her mother went shopping in the Rue d'Antibes. They took meals in a dozen different restaurants—the Pension Rouget supplied only *petit déjeuner*. They sailed out to the Lérins and climbed on Ste Marguerite up to the grim fortress where the Man in the Iron Mask (whom some historians believe to have been the elder brother of Louis XIV) was imprisoned, and picnicked by the monastery ruins, on the green isle of St Honorat. They visited the race-course and the polo-field, and found an avenue of eucalyptus-trees on a hill to the west of the town, and orange-trees in the beautifully-kept gardens of the big hotels. Almost before they were aware ten days had flown past and Madame Draguille was talking of her return to Paris.

'You know, I would like to have a look at Monaco again before I leave', she said to her daughter. 'Do you think it would be possible, or are you tired of travelling?'

'How do you feel about it, Jean?' asked Mrs Robertson.

'Oh, I'd love it', said Jean. 'I've heard so much about Monte Carlo, I'd hate to leave here without seeing it.'

'Will we see the casino terrace where the gamblers who have

STRAIGHT OUT OF 'THE CHOCOLATE SOLDIER'!

lost all their money shoot themselves?' asked David, who had a taste for the macabre.

'Well, you'll see the terrace, but I trust there won't be any shooting!' said his mother wryly.

'We could go to Nice by train, leave most of the luggage there, and go on to Monte Carlo by bus', suggested Mr Robertson. As he had to look after it the luggage was always much on his mind.

'Wouldn't it be lovely if we didn't have to bother with any', Jean remarked wistfully.

'I don't see why we have to', retorted David. 'I'm sure I could get on fine with one set of clothes.'

'I wouldn't be very surprised if you had to, before much longer!' said his mother, ruefully surveying his frayed blue shirt and sun-bleached khaki shorts.

They left Cannes by train on the morning of the first Friday after Easter, and reached Nice about an hour later.

This was the largest town they had stopped in since Paris. With a quarter of a million inhabitants, and a splendid coastline, the 'Paris of the South', besides being one of the most popular of the Riviera holiday resorts, is a commercial city of great importance, with a large trade in flowers, olive oil, and other agricultural products. Its picturesque harbour, where long rakish Mediterranean fishing boats with huge triangular sails can still be seen, is the chief port of embarkation for Corsica, birthplace of Napoleon, and an island famous (or notorious) up to the beginning of the present century for its bandits and outlaws.

'Of course! Corsica is part of France too', said David, as they drove out of Nice. 'Wouldn't it be fun to go there and be captured by bandits! Only I don't suppose there're any left now', he added regretfully.

'Whenever there's anything really decent somebody always stops it', said Leo, cynically.

'Actually it's not long since the last Corsican outlaw was hunted down', said his father reflectively. 'I remember reading about the man-hunt in the newspapers, but I don't think "decent" was the right description for that one. He was a very ferocious gentleman and killed lots of people.'

Beyond Nice the scenery held their attention. They were travelling by the coast road, and after crossing the neck of the blunt cape which forms the eastern guard of the Nice sea-front, they saw blue water again at Villefranche, a pretty lobster and sardine fishing port on a deep sheltered inlet where transatlantic liners on their way to Genoa and Naples find safe harbourage. Then, across the base of a club-shaped and thickly wooded cape at the head of which are the villages of Cap Ferrat and St Jean Cap Ferrat, they drove on by Beaulieu, with its large expensive-looking villas and rich tropical vegetation, and so out of France altogether, into the independent Principality of Monaco.

Before them, its gleaming white terraces and red roofs backed by towering pink cliffs that swept round in a curve to form the eastern ward of a beautiful bay, was the pleasure city of Monte Carlo. Below were luxuriant gardens and the hotels and offices of the Condamine, and, stretching out to sea, the blue waves creaming against its precipitous cliffs, was the rock-set town of old Monaco, with the battlements of the Prince's palace rearing high above the entrance to the almost land-locked harbour.

'Why! It's even more like a stage setting than Cannes!' was Jean's exclamation, as she got out of the bus. She stared towards the pavement opposite, where, striding along by the crowded cafés, their long dark blue cloaks floating back from their shoulders, the white and red facing on their uniforms catching the eye, and the sun waking blue flashes on their dark helmets, were two figures straight out of *The Chocolate Soldier*.

'Who are they? Are they taking part in a pageant?' asked David, his eyes round.

'A pageant!' Madame Draguille laughed. 'Those are Monegascan soldiers, David.'

'Golly!'

'How do you like them, Jean?' Madame Draguille asked.

'Oh, I think they look marvellous!' replied Jean, then began to giggle. 'If they would only stop under one of the windows and break into song they would be just perfect!'

'I believe they would if anyone asked them to', put in her father. 'Still it would be a pleasanter world if all soldiers were like these.'

They found accommodation in a small hotel in the Condamine,

STRAIGHT OUT OF 'THE CHOCOLATE SOLDIER'

and while they were having lunch, Madame Draguille, encouraged by David and Jean, gave them a brief account of the Principality, which consists to-day largely of three small towns, Monaco, the Condamine, and Monte Carlo.

'Yes, it really is an independent country', she assured them. 'And though it's so small that you can explore most of it in a day, the Princes of Monaco were once very powerful and ruled large territories in other parts of Provence. And long before *they* came it was a place of some importance. Like most of the other resorts on the Riviera it was first settled by the Greeks. Later on the Romans used it as a harbour—Portus Herculis Monaeci was their name for it—then, in the twelfth century, the Genoese arrived and built a strong castle and the beginnings of a town on the rock above the harbour.'

'So that's the oldest part—where the palace is?'

'That's right, Jean. All the rest is quite modern. Monte Carlo, for example, was unheard of until the opening of the Casino—and the foundation-stone of that was only laid in 1858—just over a hundred years ago.'

'Has anyone ever really "broken the bank" at Monte Carlo?' David wanted to know.

'I think that only happens in stories', replied his grandmother. 'Most people who gamble here—or anywhere else for that matter—lose their money. Still, there's one comfort. The money lost isn't entirely wasted.'

'Why, what happens to it?', asked Jean.

'Most of it goes to pay for the Monagascan public services', Madame Draguille explained. 'I'm not sure how it's divided now but before the war the Casino made a profit of about £1,000,000 a year, of which £50,000 went to the Prince as his private share and the rest to the public exchequer.'

'Nobody had to pay any taxes', put in Mr Robertson wistfully.

'Yes, that's true', agreed Madame Draguille. She glanced at her watch. 'Look at the time! If everyone's finished, let's go for a walk, shall we?'

'Can we go swimming?' asked David. 'We haven't been in to-day.'

'Well, you can take your costumes along and if there's time

you can have a plunge. There's a fine bathing beach just beyond the harbour.'

On leaving the hotel, Madame Draguille, who had been elected guide, took them through the busy centre of the town with its gay cafés and smart shoppers, to the Casino Gardens. Palm-trees of all shapes and sizes grew here but the Robertsons were growing 'blasé' about palms by this time and it was the cactuses that impressed them most. Some, of that common variety which look like a series of prickly cucumbers growing out of each other at unlikely angles, were as tall as three-storey houses and with prickles large and sharp as bayonets.

'Golly. I wouldn't like to run into one of these on a dark night', said David. 'If they put a hedge of these round Monaco they wouldn't need an army!'

Continuing their walk through the gardens they admired the beautifully-kept lawns and flower beds in front of the green-and-gold-roofed Casino, then rounding the Casino came out on a handsome terrace, fronted by a stone balustrade and a few palms set to give the most romantic effect. Beyond the terrace the ground fell away steeply into a stony gulley through which ran the railway line and beyond that, more steeply still, down to the beaches and the sheltered harbour where a large sea-going yacht, a wisp of smoke curling slowly from its funnel, lay quietly at anchor under the foliage-hung cliffs of Monaco.

'Picturesque, isn't it?' said Madame Draguille, as she and Jean leaned on the balustrade.

Jean nodded. 'You feel as if all sorts of marvellous adventures could happen here.'

'That's exactly what it's designed to make you feel', said her father dryly.

Further along the terrace David and Leo were engaged in a heated argument.

'What's the trouble?' called Mr Robertson.

David looked abashed.

'It's nothing—just Leo.'

'Come on, out with it', insisted his father.

'We were talking about suicide,' volunteered Leo. 'David was telling me how after they've lost all their money gambling in the

STRAIGHT OUT OF 'THE CHOCOLATE SOLDIER'!

Casino the people come out here and shoot themselves, and I said if it was me, I wouldn't!

'Sensible fellow!' said his father. 'But I don't see any need for argument there.'

'But you don't understand', burst out David. 'What Leo said was that if it was him, *he* would jump over the cliff!'

From the terrace they made their way down to the beach, where the youngsters had a quick bathe—more to be able to boast afterwards of having bathed at Monte Carlo than for any other reason. Then, returning to the high ground, they mounted by a curving road running along the east side of the rock into old Monaco, entering at last, through a gate bearing the date 1533, on a large gravelled *place* set about ancient cannon, each with a pile of ammunition beside it, and with the Palace buildings on the north side.

Apart from an elderly gentleman and two ladies standing by the battlements above the harbour looking at Monte Carlo and the cliffs opposite, and two armed sentries, marching to and fro by the red-and-white-striped sentry boxes at the palace gates, they had the *place* to themselves. It was another world from that of gay, bustling Monte Carlo.

'Can we go into the Palace?' asked Leo.

'I'm afraid not', said Madame Draguille, regretfully. 'They do let you see some of the rooms, when the Prince is away, but he's living there now and can't be disturbed. Some of the ceilings are beautifully painted, and there's a lot of interesting furniture of the time of Louis XIII and Louis XV.'

From the palace they went down through the narrow, spotlessly clean streets of the little town to the Oceanographic Museum.

Monaco's Oceanographic Museum is world famous. Founded by Albert I of Monaco, a Prince who devoted most of his life and huge income to scientific research, it is a tall building of white limestone, built on the very edge of the cliff and in one place out over the sea, and contains, besides halls where specimens of thousands of varieties of fish and other sea creatures are exhibited, a splendid Conference Room, a unique collection of paintings showing under-water landscapes (or rather seascapes), a fine

THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN FRANCE

collection of instruments and other equipment used by the Prince on his research voyages, and, on the lowest floor, a large aquarium.

It was this last that interested the youngsters most.

Here in huge tanks lit by concealed lamps were turtles, octopuses, and huge quarrelsome lobsters, besides fish of all shapes, sizes and colours, disporting themselves much as in the state of nature; but what impressed them most in the aquarium was neither fish nor other creature of the under-water world: it was a hole in the floor! In one part of the aquarium, in a place where, except for the diffused light from the tanks, it was dark, a well-shaft had been made through the floor, and, looking down this shaft, they could see, far below, sunlit waves dashing and breaking at the foot of the precipice.

'It's like looking at the earth from the bottom of a mine-shaft on the moon!' said Jean, in an awed voice, and all the rest of her stay in Monaco she was haunted by the memory of that vision in the aquarium, though it was not till the following morning, when they were in the train on the way back to Nice where they were to part company with Madame Draguille and desert the golden sands and blue waters of 'the azure coast' for the high valleys and ice-mountains of the Alps, that she realized that she had here the perfect symbol for the vest-pocket country that they had just visited. Monaco, too, was strange, beautiful, and as they say in Scotland 'all tapsalteerie'.

Chapter 12

THE ROARING MOUNTAIN

THEY made the journey north in two stages, stopping overnight at Grenoble, a handsome town with a famous University, set in a crook of the River Isère and ringed by Alpine peaks. During the second day they drove up the course of the Isère as far as Albertville, then, through romantic gorges hemmed in by soaring peaks and cliffs, and reached the spa town of St Gervais-Les-Bains, where they left the bus to complete the journey by mountain railway.

This was the most exciting part of the journey. Half the time they were chugging up rocky shutes so steep that the little engine could only drag its string of rattling, wooden-seated, tramcar-like carriages at a walking pace. At some particularly steep places, it seemed to Jean that the wheels simply *must* slip and engine, carriages, and passengers go hurtling back into the valley below, but always (just when she felt she must say something about it) with a bone-shaking jolt they would begin to mount again.

Owing to the narrowness of the gorge, once they were out of sight of the St Gervais basin their view for the most part was restricted to the wet rock walls on each side of the track. Now and then, however, a foaming stream would leap past the windows and go plunging down through wet greenery into a hidden abyss. Once, laid slantwise down the side of a ravine, they saw a line of pipes and what looked like the power-house of a small hydro-electric installation.

'Yes, I expect that's what it is', confirmed Mr Robertson, in answer to David's query. 'As you know, France has very little coal and what there is is nearly all in the north, near the Belgian frontier; so, as they don't want to import more than they have to,

they're making more and more use of water-power. There are some very big hydro-electric installations up here in the Alps, but you find them in all the mountainous regions now. Paris gets a lot of its electricity from the Massif Central for example, the mountainous region west of the Rhône and south of Vichy. Then there are installations in the Pyrénées, and they say the new hydro-electric scheme in the Rhône Valley will be one of the largest power units of its kind in the world when completed.'

'But look, we're almost up', he added, and even as he spoke, they negotiated the last steep, and the little train, with a triumphant hoot, rattled out of the prisoning gorge and into a broad green valley, threaded by the milk-white glacier torrent of the River Arve and walled in by stupendous mountains. Among them was Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in Europe, a towering giant, skirted with dark forests, toothed with sharp pinnacles and wedges of storm-tortured rock, its great dome of ice and snow hidden now above hurrying rain-clouds and crawling mists.

They had arrived.

The Vale of Chamonix is the most celebrated valley in the French Alps. Bounded on the south and east by Mont Blanc and other giants of the Pennine Alps, and on the west and north by Mont Brévent and the Aiguilles Rouges, it is about twelve miles long and has an average breadth of two miles. It contains something of almost every type of Alpine scenery: a glacier river, mountain torrents, green meadows, shaggy forests, cliffs, needles and crags of storm-sculptured stone, and great glaciers like La Mer de Glace and Les Bossons. Of these last, Les Bossons glacier crept down to the valley just behind the hotel of which Mrs Robertson's schoolfriend, Madame Durac, and her stout husband (whom everyone, including his wife, called Monsieur Georges) were the proprietors.

The full interest of their situation and their proximity to Les Bossons glacier was not, however, apparent to the youngsters that first evening. More rain was falling as they left the train; M. George had a car waiting and whisked them off immediately to the hotel, and by the time they had unpacked and eaten a meal it was too dark to see far. Jean and David did slip on waterproofs

THE ROARING MOUNTAIN

and walk down through the village (which seemed to consist entirely of hotels) as far as the bridge over the flooded Arve, which breathed with a cold breath on their faces when they leaned over the parapet. But fatigue—they had been up at dawn—made them feel cold, and they soon returned to the warmth of the hotel lounge. Here they were introduced by Madame Duroc to the only other guests who were then staying at the hotel: her young brother, a Parisian architect named Michel Rebel, and his still more youthful Breton wife, who bore without embarrassment the romantic name of Yseult—the heroine of the most famous of the Breton legends.

'Michel and Yseult are only staying with us for a few days', Madame Duroc explained. 'Michel was working on a house by the shores of Lake Léman—the Lake of Geneva you call it, I think—and couldn't pass Mont Blanc without saluting it. Afterwards they're motoring back to Paris. You didn't see them at dinner because they were at Chamonix then.'

'Mont Blanc is Michel's *grande passion*', sighed Yseult. 'I'm just his wife!'

Michel, a clever-looking young man with bright grey eyes and a jaunty goatee beard, protested.

'Oh come, Yseult. I was only once on the mountain this winter!'

'Yes, but look how long you stayed then!' cried his wife. 'He got caught in a blizzard and was up there for five days. I was on the very point of buying a black dress and going home to my father in St Malo when he turned up again!'

'You must have been *high*!' cried David.

Michel grinned, 'Well, fairly.'

'High? He was on the very top', broke in Yseult, disapprovingly. 'He's been up there twice now and he's still not satisfied!'

'Gosh!' David moved his seat nearer to this hero.

'David climbs too', said Madame Duroc.

'Oh, I haven't done anything much yet', mumbled David, confused. 'Nothing like you, I mean. But I like it awfully!'

'There's nothing to compare with it', said Michel, seriously. 'You and I must have a scramble before Yseult and I leave. We won't be able to go far—it's too dangerous at this season—but we can have a look at the Dent du Midi perhaps.'

'That'd be grand!'

Yseult looked at Jean pathetically.

'Now they're off', she sighed. 'It'll be nothing but mountains—mountains for the rest of our stay. You don't like mountains, do you?'

'I'm not keen on climbing but I like to look at them.'

'Ugh. I detest them! Every time Michel sets out on a climb I expect him to have an accident.'

'I suppose there are a lot of accidents in the Alps', said Jean soberly.

'Well, not a great number perhaps, but every year there are some. Michel says if you take sensible precautions, and have some experience, there's little danger, but . . . oh well let's talk of something else, shall we? You're touring aren't you?'

'Yes, we've just come from the Côte d'Azur.'

'Have you been to Brittany yet?'

'Not yet. I'm hoping we'll be able to go there later in the year, but I don't know if there will be time. We're travelling up to Strasbourg when we leave here and after that back to Paris.'

'But you can't visit France without seeing St Malo!' protested Yseult, really horrified. 'Why Brittany's the finest part of France!'

'I suppose you go there often for holidays?' said Jean.

'Whenever I can manage it. We may drive home that way.'

'Goodness! that will be an awfully long run, won't it?'

'About five days. It's not quite so crazy as it sounds. We're going near there in any case. Michel has to make a business call at Vichy and another in Touraine and, besides, we're used to long runs. Michel specializes in making new houses look old and old houses feel comfortable—at least that's how he puts it! and we're always running around.'

'And he takes you with him! How nice! You must see all sorts of interesting places.'

'Yes, it is rather pleasant, though if Michel could do exactly what he wanted I think he would spend most of his time building igloos!' She nodded across the room. 'Listen to them.'

David and Michel were now at the table in a huddle over a large-scale map of the Chamonix area.

'Oh, it's been climbed many times', they heard Michel say.

'It's not the most difficult of the Alpine peaks by a long way. Why I like it is because it's so varied. Rock, snow slopes, glaciers, ice cliffs—you find them all on Mont Blanc.'

'Do you know who climbed it first?' David asked.

'A guide called Jacques Balmat. That was in 1786. Before that it was believed to be unclimbable, but since then, it's been scaled many times—from all sides. The frontiers of Italy and France meet up there, you know, and of course Switzerland's just over the way, so from the top you look down on three countries when it's clear. But you don't see much. You're so high everything looks blurred.'

'I never thought of that. Still, it's not the view that matters. It's the climb!'

Michel smiled and clapped a hand on David's shoulder.

'That's it, *mon vieux*. You know it all. It's the climb that matters.'

Jean and Yseult looked at each other, and Yseult tapped her temple with a delicate forefinger.

'Fous', she whispered, '*complètement fous*.'

Shortly afterwards Madame Duroc brought through a tray loaded with steaming mugs of chocolate, and when these had been dealt with Mrs Robertson shooed her family off to bed, where Leo had been dispatched an hour since. But the night's adventures were not over yet. About two in the morning Jean was startled out of a deep sleep by what sounded like the boom of a cannon. While it reverberated in the narrow valley she sat up, listening, wondering if it were the beginning of a thunderstorm. Then a second boom, followed by a noise as of an express train dashing through a tunnel, woke the echoes without any preliminary lightning flash, and Jean leapt out of bed, threw on a dressing-gown, and ran out on the landing with the intention of arousing the rest of the household. She was brought up short by the sight of a dark head silhouetted against the staircase window, which, being at the back of the house, looked towards the mountain. At the sharp intake of her breath, the dark head turned towards her, and, a little frightened, she challenged it. 'Who's that?'

'It's me, fathead!' answered David's voice. 'Who did you think I was—The Spectre of the Brocken?'

'You might have been anybody for all I knew!' retorted Jean, in relief. She joined her brother at the window. The rain had ceased. A few ragged clouds silvered by moonlight sailed high in the dark blue sky, and through the clouds, over the midnight black of its forested buttress, so high above her that she had to stand close to the window to see it all, floated the shimmering ice-cap of Mont Blanc.

'Marvellous, isn't it?' whispered David.

Jean nodded. 'Wonderful.' Another boom, more distant, broke the silence. It seemed to come from Mont Blanc, but in that box of echoes it was difficult to be sure.

'What's that noise, David? It sounds just like guns or bombs falling.'

'It's avalanches', said David. 'Michel says this is the best—I mean the worst—time of the year for them.'

He looked up at the shining ice-cap above with the worshipful expression Jean had seen on his face when he learned that Michel had been up on the summit.

'Wouldn't it be heavenly to be up there!'

Chapter 13

GLACIERS AND GOATS

MORNING came bright and clear, and Jean, David, and Leo were out in the garden before breakfast. Perched on a green mound among cherry-trees—still blossoming, for in these high valleys spring comes weeks later than on the coast—they gazed admiringly up at the mountains and drew deep breaths of the exhilarating Alpine air, which was here delightfully scented with pines and herbage.

'It gives me a *real* pain in the neck to look at it', announced Leo after an astonished inspection of the Mont Blanc ice-cap—by which ambiguous statement he was not disparaging that noble eminence but paying tribute to its extraordinary height.

'Try lying on your back on the grass, Leo', David suggested, 'Then you'll see it comfortably!'

There were heights all round them, even the least of which would have been counted a considerable mountain at home. On the south side Mont Blanc, of course, with its forested foot-hills, its jagged *aiguilles*, its bold rock faces and tremendous ice-dome, dwarfed everything else. But up the valley where it narrowed by Chamonix were many beautiful peaks, some still touched with snow. Directly opposite, over the turbulent Arve, which, originating in the Mer de Glace Glacier, dashes its milky flood down the length of the vale, the great mass of the Brévent, cloaked almost to its summit with firs and pines, hung like a green thunder-cloud.

The proximity of the hotel to the Bossons Glacier also was now apparent. Seen from the garden it was like a great waterfall coming from above the level of the lowest clouds, to pass behind the shoulder of a hill, shaped like a steep pyramid, and so dark with trees that it looked black against the shining ice. At this

distance the ice seemed all of one spotless whiteness and as smooth as glass, though in fact, according to Michel, who joined them in time to hear Leo make a remark about sliding, it was neither one nor the other.

'No, it's not at all smooth when you're close to it', he told them. 'Just the opposite. It's all broken up into huge waves—like the sea in a heavy swell—and in some places the surface is almost as rough as sand-paper. It picks up loads of grit on its way down the hill. And not only grit of course! Huge boulders sometimes, and anything else lying around. You'll see the heaps of rubble which have melted out of it when you go up there.'

'Is it true that if you lose anything on Mont Blanc it turns up sometime or other at the foot of one of the glaciers?' asked Jean. 'I remember reading that in a magazine once.'

'Well, I'm not sure if everything that's lost turns up', replied Michel, 'but certainly the glaciers bring down quite a lot—ice axes, rucksacks, alpine stocks—all sorts of equipment. Lost climbers too occasionally', he added soberly.

Jean made a wry mouth. 'Do you mean it?'

'Oh yes, it does happen', Michel nodded. 'Once when I was up here they found the body of a climber who had been lost seven years before. He had fallen into a crevasse (that's a crack in the ice—some of them are tremendously deep) and had been frozen right into the heart of the glacier.'

'How ghastly!'

'It does sound pretty horrible', Michel agreed.

'What's that?' demanded Leo, suddenly, catching David's elbow.

'Where?'

'Up there. Straight up in the air!'

Following his gaze they looked up and saw high above the valley, moving along thread-like cables towards the peak of the Brévent, a tiny red capsule.

'Oh, that! That's the Brévent Téléférique!' laughed Michel. 'There're several of them in the Chamonix Valley, but the Brévent's the most spectacular.'

'You mean there are people up there?' cried Jean. The mere thought made her feel giddy.

'Of course. That's how most visitors to Chamonix climb the mountains! It looks alarming but it isn't really dangerous. I don't think there's ever been an accident on the *téléférique*.'

'We *must* go up on it, David', said Leo excitedly.

'You bet we will! It's as good as flying!'

'Here, I thought you were a climber?' protested Michel.

After breakfast David, Jean, Leo, and Michel and—despite her avowed abhorrence of mountains—Yseult too, left Mr Robertson in the garden with M. Georges and Mrs Robertson in the hotel with Madame Duroc, and clambered up to the glacier.

It was about forty-five minutes' walk, and at first their way lay by narrow field paths between green meadows set about here and there with clumps of trees, often so planted as to shelter a neat little house, sometimes of stone, sometimes of timber, but most commonly with a lower storey of stone and an upper of timber. All the houses, except the very smallest, had balconies, usually on the south side; the roofs—unlike the shallow or flat roofs of the Riviera, were steeply pitched (to prevent a great weight of snow gathering on them) and in many cases the eaves, supported on stout posts, extended feet beyond the walls, the space left being utilized to store neatly piled bundles of faggots.

'That's a useful idea', said Michel, indicating the projecting eaves. 'While the faggots are stored they make an extra wall which helps to keep the house cool in summer and warm in winter, and then, if you're snowed up, you've your fuel right at hand.'

Beyond the fields they entered the forest and mounted the pyramidal hill by a steep and stony track. At first it twisted and turned every dozen yards or so, then, at last making up its mind, went veering up to the left; the greyish ice of the glacier showed through the trees, and they came out, past a crooked signpost, on to a railed gallery, running along the face of a cliff above the rocky gully where the glacier ended.

At the melting-point the ice was dark and slushy, and from under it flowed a muddy stream, which went swirling among the heaps of gravel and other debris strewn the floor of the ravine. Then, finding clearer passage, it leapt over a little fall and went

splashing down to add its waters to the Arve. Further up the hill the glacier was of a dazzling whiteness, save only where it was broken by blue shadows—the troughs of the ice waves that Michel had spoken of.

As Yseult and Jean clung to the rail of the narrow gallery, looking up at it, they shivered in a piercing wind blowing down from the ice, but David with a glad cry of 'Ice!' raced off round the next bend in the track, and before anyone could stop him, Leo had followed.

'I'd better make sure they don't get into mischief', said Michel, anxiously, and hurried after them.

Jean and Yseult followed more slowly, then as they turned the bend and saw Michel running down the rock-face, they hurried, realizing something was wrong. A moment later, they saw David, despite a cry of warning from Michel, step out on the ice and Leo about to follow him. Fortunately, the latter, who was wearing ordinary shoes, slipped and sat down with a bump at his third step, and, putting on a spurt, Michel dashed up and collared him before he could go further. But by this time David, who had been too intent on keeping his balance to hear Michel's shout, was a fair way out, and in difficulties. He was trying to get over a huge ice-wave, at least twelve feet high, but his boots, which were not properly nailed for ice, would not grip, and he kept slithering back. At last he took a short run at the obstacle, almost reached the top, came down with a crash, and slithered and rolled back into the hollow again.

'Stay where you are!' ordered Michel, grimly. Making his own way out, swiftly, but carefully, he led David, limping from a bruised and lacerated knee, and nursing a hand which had lost skin from the knuckles, back to the safety of the rock, and there, instead of sympathy, gave the adventurer an angry scolding.

'Do you want to break your leg, you ass? I really thought you had more sense, David! Dashing out on the ice like that without knowing a thing about it! You'll never make a mountaineer if you go in for this sort of trick!'

'I didn't know it would be so difficult', said David, ruefully. 'It's all right, Jean. I'm not hurt', he reassured his sister.

'No, but you very well might have been', snorted Michel, still

GLACIERS AND GOATS

angry. 'If you had fallen over that crest instead of back from it, you might have cracked your skull. It's just as easy to kill yourself at the foot of a mountain as at the top. Ice is always dangerous!' He relented a little and pulled out a spare handkerchief. 'Here, take this and tie up your hand.'

'I've got a spare one, too', said Jean. 'Sit down and I'll fix it, David.'

'I'm sorry, Michel', mumbled David. His cuts and bruises were nothing to the shame he felt at having disgraced himself before his hero.

The Robertsons lunched that day at a table laid under the cherry trees and afterwards they set off on foot for Chamonix. It was delightful weather for walking, the sun just pleasantly warm, the sky blue save for some fleecy clouds over the Mont Blanc; the air musical with the tinkle of cow-bells and goat-bells in distant fields and so fresh and exhilarating that they were all in the highest spirits.

*'Là-haut sur la montagne
L'était un vieux chalet
Murs blancs, toit de bardeaux,
Devant la porte un vieux bouleau',*

carolled David, and they all joined in the chorus:

*'Là-haut sur la montagne
L'était un vieux chalet,
Là-haut sur la montagne
L'était un vieux chalet!'*

From Les Bossons to Chamonix was about two miles and there was something of interest at every turn in the road: a chalet perched on the Brévent's shoulder with a tiny steep field hung like a green beard from its doorstep; the Brévent Téléferique creeping like a small red fly along its thread-like cable: another téléferique, less terrifying this time, its red cabin swooping from pylon to pylon in the descent from the Dent du Midi, and seen as it came nearer to be shaped like a squat telephone kiosk:

a side road going up to the mountain with the signboard of the French Youth Hostel Association at the crossing, and two hostellers, a boy and a girl, with skis strapped to their shoulders, cycling in the direction of Chamonix: open sports cars full of bronzed faces and fluttering scarves; and beyond the Dent du Midi rail halt a green crag with a high bald rock-face fronting the road and painted in huge sprawling white letters with the magic words 'École d'Escalade'. Up this cliff, as the Robertsons passed, three climbers, two men and a girl, roped together, swarmed their way nonchalantly as if they were mounting a flight of stairs, till, reaching the summit, they were greeted with ironical cheers from friends and fellow pupils, sprawling on the grass at the cliff-foot and waiting their turn to make the ascent.

Beyond this unusual school the houses began to be frequent, hotel signs invited, and shortly afterwards they entered Chamonix, a pretty, spotlessly clean little town. Every second shop seemed to sell alpine equipment—clothes, boots, walking-sticks, ice-axes, skis, rucksacks, flasks, primus and spirit stoves, neat little alpine tents with floors and double roofs. Every second building seemed to be a hotel, and half the population were in gaily-hued mountain garb. White, red, sky-blue, and dark blue, the bright woollens caught the eye at every corner; but if Jean felt a twinge of envy at the sight of some of these costumes, in David they roused only a withering scorn.

'Mannequins!' he snorted. '*There's* the real thing, Jean', and he pointed out a group of young men in worn duffle-coats with well-greased skis on their shoulders, and faces and hands so burned by wind and sun that they looked almost black.

'They certainly look highly professional', admitted Jean, respectful of expert opinion. 'All the same——' and here she eyed one of the 'mannequins' who was chattering to a friend on a doorstep of a nearby hotel—'all the same I wouldn't say no to that red and white jersey over there!'

After exploring the town (almost all modern; the village which Shelley knew was destroyed by fire in the last decade of the nineteenth century) and buying some specimens of Savoy pottery, including an amusing set of coffee cups of very thick earthenware, lopsided but prettily decorated with white edelweiss on a chocolate

ground, they went to Mrs Robertson's favourite beauty spot. This was a woodland park picturesquely set about with mossy rocks and trees, threaded by a white glacier stream and with a splendid view of the surrounding mountains.

An hour passed quickly here, then in pursuit of afternoon tea they made their way to a nearby village where they found a café which could provide this unusual beverage. As it was quite warm, they decided to take their refreshment in the open air, at a table overlooking the village street.

The tea, when it came (as is often the case in France, where tea is drunk only by a minority) was very poor—not hot and too weak—but the bread and honey which accompanied it were delicious. The honey, though stored from the previous summer, still smelt of flowers and had a pleasant tang which none of the children had encountered before.

'It's funny, but somehow I never thought there would be bees up here', said Jean. 'I thought it would be too high.'

'It's not really surprising', replied her mother. 'The Alpine meadows are simply covered with flowers in summer. Chamonix honey is famous.'

'And Chamonix cheese too', added her husband.

'Here's some fine raw material for that coming down the hill', chuckled David, as a flock of angular mountain goats came straggling down the village street, their udders swinging, their bells jangling.

'Oh, they have other sorts too', said his mother, 'though the best cow pastures are in the lower valleys. Oh, but do look!' she cried suddenly.

A car coming from Chamonix and travelling fast had had to brake suddenly to avoid running into the goats, which now, instead of getting out of the way, hunched up, presented horns and, despite the motorist's cries and the reiterated hooting of his klaxon, barred the way till the aged herdsman who had been far in the rear came up at a run and began shouting and laying about him with his staff. This rear assault was too much for the goats. Though they still absolutely declined to pass the car they scattered in every other direction. One jumped up on a low wall, where it stood bleating indignantly. Another ran into an open door and

THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN FRANCE

was swept out again by an angry lady with a broom. Yet another came prancing sidelong into David's chair, almost knocking it away from under him, then, bleating piteously, scampered off after the main body of the herd which had disappeared up a *sidelane*.

Meanwhile the quiet village had come alive. Heads appeared out of windows and figures in doorways, and though the motorist, the innocent cause of all the excitement, now drove on, it was some time before the ancient herdsman, who seemed to be the village 'natural', rounded up his hairy flock and removed them and himself from the jocularities of the villagers.

'Well it was fun while it lasted', chortled David. 'If the people up here aren't so well off as those in Chamonix, they do see life!'

'Yes, and now you know why people in France never get quite so stodgy as those in some other countries', said his father. 'The goats won't let them!'

Chapter 14

A FLIGHT AND A FALL

NEXT morning, leaving Mrs Robertson and Madame Duroc reviving memories of their student days in Paris (and a formal protest by Yseult that she only accompanied them under duress having been publicly made and noted) the rest of the party set off down the valley in Michel's car for the village of Les Houches, where they were to take one of the *téléfériques* up the Mont Blanc.

Once more it was a splendid spring day, and if David had been excited on the way to Chamonix, now he could hardly contain himself. This was a red-letter day in David's calendar. Whereas his father, Yseult, Jean, and Leo intended nothing more ambitious than a walk on the ridge to which the *téléférique* would carry them, he and Michel were off on the promised 'scramble', and if the alpenstocks, the rucksacks, and the length of climbing rope now in the boot of the car signified anything, the next eight hours were to have rather more of ice in it than Mrs Robertson had imagined when she sanctioned the expedition.

For Leo the excitement of this trip lay less in the 'where' of their going than in 'how'. Nothing in the valley was half as fascinating to him as the *téléfériques*, and as they parked the car and walked up the slope to the departure tower he gave the novel machine before him his full attention.

At first sight it looked extremely like a section of the electricity grid—lines of thick black cable suspended at intervals from pylons rising far above the tallest trees and going straight up the steep hillside in the direction of a tiny speck on the skyline that was presumably another tower, similar to the one they were now approaching, and which looked, Leo thought, like a big signal box. The travelling cabins, one of which was then swooping

down the hill towards them, were attached to the cables by a curved iron arm rising out of the roof. Seen close up, they appeared to be only metal boxes painted bright red, about the size of large garden huts, and with small windows and apertures on four sides. How they travelled, however, baffled him completely.

'Is there an engine inside the cabin?' he asked at last, turning to his father.

'No, it's much simpler and much cleverer than that', replied Mr Robertson. 'It's not the cars that move. It's the cables—one of them at any rate—the others are only overhead rails. But here's the clever thing. You must have noticed there are always two *téléférique* cabins, one going up as the other comes down?'

'Yes, I did notice that', said Leo, nodding gravely.

'Well, the reason for that and the secret of the *téléférique* is simply this, that the cabin coming downhill more or less pulls up the cabin going up—they move each other like the two arms of a pair of scales.'

'Or the big weight you see going down the side as you go up in a lift', said David.

'Exactly!' said his father. 'Of course you need the engines in the towers too, to overcome friction and make up any difference in weight between the loads in the two cabins.'

'You mean', said Leo, 'that if a very fat man was going up the mountain in one cabin and a very thin lady coming down in the other, the engines would have to work a bit harder than if it was the other way round?'

'He's got it', laughed Michel. 'Come on, let's get upstairs.'

The ticket office at the entrance to the tower where they paid their fares was comically like the box office of a cinema, but when they clambered up a rather dark and echoing stair to the top storey of the tower they found themselves in a very queer place indeed.

'A bit like a dovecote?' suggested Jean, dubiously.

'More like an underground railway station in a church belfry', chuckled David.

But Leo, who was addicted to 'comics', had the most original suggestion.

'It's like a secret rocket station for sending rockets to the moon!' said Leo. 'Only it doesn't look a very *fast* rocket', he added, surveying the cabin.

The *téléférique* cabin, the red bird they had seen floating so gracefully down the mountainside a few minutes before, was now nesting glumly in a berth beside a short quay, like the platform of a railway station. Beyond it was another similar berth, but empty.

'It looks lonely', said Jean, gazing at it sympathetically.

'It is', said Yseult. 'Every *téléférique* is lonely. They're like the man and woman on the Swiss weather barometers. When the one goes in the other comes out, and the only time they meet they're travelling too fast to say a word to each other!'

While they were laughing at this sally, the cabin attendant and three more passengers came up the stair, a friendly Dutch couple and, surprisingly, a painter with white overalls under a buttonless overcoat, and with a pot of red paint in his hand!

David nudged Jean to draw her attention to the last arrival but she had no time to do more than wonder what on earth he was going to paint up on the slopes of Mont Blanc, when the attendant directed them into the cabin, and slammed and bolted the heavy door. A bell shrilled, machinery rumbled, sliding doors opened to reveal the mountainside, the cabin began to move forward, jolted twice on the skids, then leapt out over the lip of the launching platform. Lightly as a bird it soared up the forested mountainside, now lifting a little as it passed the pylons, now dipping to salute the waving crests of the tallest fir-trees, but keeping always the same swift, smooth, and unhurried motion; up and up the steep of the hill till the church and houses of Les Houches, in the valley below, looked as small as toys.

'Well, Jean?' asked Yseult, taking out her handkerchief and holding it to her nose. 'How do you like it?'

'It's not in the least what I expected', confessed Jean, watching the hill drift away from under them. 'I thought it would be exciting, perhaps a little frightening; but it isn't either.'

'The *téléférïques* have been the ruin of the Alps', grumbled Michel into his beard. 'You can't go for a walk on a ridge now without stumbling over an infant class!'

'What do you think about it, Leo?' asked Mr Robertson, but Leo was so entranced that his father had to repeat his question twice before he heard him.

'It's prodigious!' he said, when he did hear. Then, 'Simply prodigious, Daddy', meaning perhaps 'splendid, glorious, stupendous, or prodigious', but more probably all four at once.

'Here's the other cabin coming!' cried David. It swooped towards them, seeming to move very fast because of their own motion, and swept past with a swish, a creaking of pulleys, and a flutter of a scarf at a window.

Now they were on the second part of the ascent and all beginning to feel the effects of the change of altitude.

'My ears are ringing like anything', cried David.

'Mine, too', said Jean, 'and I feel a little bit giddy.'

'I with ith wath just my ears!' snuffled Yseult, through her handkerchief, and looking at her they were startled to see the small square of white linen stained with blood.

'Don't worry. It's just the change in air pressure', Michel reassured them. 'It'll stop in a minute.'

'Ith one of the reasons I hate mountains!' lisped Yseult pathetically.

'If people *walked* up the slopes instead of using contraptions like this, the change would never trouble them', growled Michel. 'Here, take my hanky. Yours is soaked.'

They had now passed beyond the last firs and had rough grassy slopes, here and there broken by outcrops of granite, beneath them. Then, slowing, and with a sense of height they had not experienced in mid-flight, they slipped gently into the gaping mouth at the top of the summit tower, and, to Jean and David's astonishment, for they had imagined an empty desolation of rock and snow up here, the first thing that caught their eye when they came out into the sunlight was a large wooden chalet, whose signboard showed it to be both restaurant and place of residence. Not far along the ridge was another and larger building, and on the other side of deep valleys and ridges still larger multi-storeyed buildings, which Jean guessed at once to be sanatoria. Nor was this all. Standing untended and deserted on a rusty narrow-gauge

A FLIGHT AND A FALL

rail-track, which wound up the slope to the left till it disappeared round a rocky and snow-streaked buttress of the Mont Blanc proper, was a sooty black dwarf locomotive! The mystery of the painter was now solved.

'Well I'm blowed!' gasped David. 'Houses! Houses up here!' He sounded deeply aggrieved.

'That's what happens when you get *téléfériques*', sighed Michel swinging on his rucksack. 'Never mind, David, there are none where we're going, I promise you.' He glanced at his wristwatch—the kind with a compass incorporated in it. 'And now, if you're ready, I think we should get on our way.'

'You bet I'm ready', said David.

'Remember! Don't do anything rash', was Mr Robertson's farewell to his son.

'And don't get lost in a blizzard', Yseult warned her husband. 'Or this time I'll divorce you for desertion!'

To these foolish admonitions the mountaineers replied with looks of disdain, then went clumping off up the line of the rail-track. At the place where the line curved they turned for a moment to wave their sticks in farewell, then, mounting behind the crags, vanished.

'Let's take a walk along the ridge, shall we?' suggested Yseult.

Leo ran over to examine the engine.

'How did they get the engine up?' he demanded, when he rejoined them.

'Perhaps they brought it up in pieces and assembled it on top', suggested Jean. 'Like steamships on the lakes.'

Leo considered this gravely. 'Yes, they could have done that', he agreed, then, with a lightning change of subject, 'Doesn't the air up here make you feel as if you're full right up to the eyes with ginger beer!'

'Champagne's the word', said his father, pained.

'Well, all tingly, anyway.'

The pure exhilarating air of the Alpine meadow not only flushed their cheeks and made their blood sing in their veins; it soon made them all feel decidedly peckish, and when, after admiring the views on every side and walking perhaps three miles, Mr Robertson suggested a snack at the chalet before they returned

to the valley, the idea was at once approved and put into execution.

The chalet was busier than when they first saw it. Two or three people were lounging in deck-chairs near the door, reading or gazing out over the mountains, and in the long low restaurant three of the tables were already occupied, one by the Dutch couple.

Leo and Jean had hot chocolate with the popular French biscuits called *petits beurrés*; Mr Robertson and Yseult *café filtres* (coffee made on the table to ensure its being perfectly fresh) and sandwiches. Then to console him for not having been allowed to climb up to the snows, Leo finished up with a large vanilla ice, after which they went outside again to laze on the hillside, till the next descent of the *téléférique*.

'I do hope your nose doesn't bleed this time', said Jean to Yseult, as they took their places.

'No, it only happens when I'm going up', replied Yseult.

But Jean and Leo found the sensations of the descent more discomfiting than those of the climb.

'It's like having water in your ears', Leo complained.

At Les Houches the air of the valley seemed lifeless and sultry after that on the ridge, but this feeling soon passed off and by the time they were back at Les Bossons they were all, despite the recent snack, ready for the late lunch which Madame Duroc had waiting for them.

Later that afternoon Jean got out her sketchbook and walked down the road to do a nice 'bit' where the hotel showed through an arch of greenery. Then, following a footpath which ran off from the road along the banks of a shallow stream, she discovered behind the modern buildings of Les Bossons the remnant of the original village, including a rather pretty little church—not much larger than an ordinary room—and some extremely tumble-down cottages. The most ruinous—part of its roof was covered with turf and the open door hung a-slant on broken hinges—had a thin wisp of smoke curling from its chimney, but so utterly derelict was it that Jean could not believe that anyone lived there. She was about to peep inside when an old woman dressed in a

rusty black gown, with a dented bucket in her hand, came hobbling out of the door, and, on catching sight of Jean, looked back at her so suspiciously over a humped shoulder, that she retreated in confusion. After that she went down to the bridge over the Arve and made another sketch, but somehow the image of the old lady, peering back over her shoulder, perhaps afraid to move from the doorstep in case Jean intended to steal her poor treasures, would not go out of her mind. Back at the hotel, where she saw M. Georges digging in his vegetable garden, she walked over to ask him about her.

'Hasn't she got an old-age pension or anything like that?' Jean wanted to know. She had seen so few people in France who looked really poor—patches in plenty but hardly any rags—that she was doubly distressed now.

M. Georges rested on his spade. 'Yes, she has a pittance from the state but it does not amount to much, I'm afraid. And she's so independent she gets angry if anyone else tries to help. There are many old people in France like that.'

'But I'm sure she doesn't get enough to eat and that cottage certainly isn't fit to live in!' persisted Jean. 'The people at Fayence weren't rich but nobody there looked as if they were hungry!'

'I don't think anyone in good health and able to move around need go hungry in France today', said M. Georges. 'We're so short of miners, for example, that there are villages in the north where you hear more Polish spoken than French. And in the south you must have noticed how many Italians are working on the farms—simply because there aren't enough Frenchmen to do the jobs. But when people get too old to work—or to shift about in search of it—then it's not so good as it might be. It's true we have a national insurance scheme, something like yours in Great Britain, but on the whole it's more concerned with the care of the young than of the old, as indeed, most of our social services are.'

'But why? Old people need looking after just as much as young ones!'

'Perhaps, but the government wants to increase the population

—to have more soldiers to defend the country in case of invasion probably. So it tries to encourage large families by giving those who have them all kinds of benefits: relief from taxation: family allowances—three or four times as generous as those paid in your country; cheap family tickets on the railways——’

‘We’ve one of those!’ interrupted Jean.

‘Yes, visitors get them too’, nodded M. Georges, ‘but there are many other privileges also. Why! when wines and spirits were short they even gave a ration of rum to youngsters in their early teens and none to old boys like me who would have appreciated it!’

‘But that’s crazy!’ cried Jean.

‘*Complètement fou*’, agreed M. Georges. ‘But then most governments are crazy, aren’t they, and as for the French Government!’ M. Georges raised his eyes and a hand to heaven. ‘*Dieu nous préserve!*’ He resumed his digging and Jean went indoors.

She found David and Michel taking off their boots in the hall. David’s cheeks were as red as apples and his eyes sparkling with excitement.

‘Gosh, Jean, you should have been with us!’ he cried. ‘We crossed the glacier away up on the hill and we’ve been on the rocks and oh, we’ve done just everything!’

‘Well, was David any use?’ Mr Robertson asked, coming through from the back premises at the sound of their voices.

‘Not bad at all’, said Michel, smiling. ‘Very good in fact—especially on rock.’

‘Well, I’m very thankful to see you both back’, said Mrs Robertson. ‘It’s absurd, but I’ve had an unpleasant feeling all afternoon that there was going to be an accident. Stupid of me!’

But Mrs Robertson’s premonition was not, after all, so stupid. Later that evening David took Jean out to the mound in the orchard to show her the part of the mountain Michel and he had crossed. She stepped back a pace to see better and stepped into space. It was a drop of no more than three feet, but she landed awkwardly, with her foot jammed between two stones, and when she tried to rise fell back again with a cry of pain.

A FLIGHT AND A FALL

'What's the matter?' cried David, springing down beside her.
'Have you hurt yourself, Jean?'

'It's my ankle', gasped Jean. 'It hurts like anything!'
Then, much to David's alarm, Jean fainted.

Chapter 15

YSEULT HAS AN IDEA

'THERE's nothing else for it, we'll have to go back to Paris when we leave here.'

It was Mrs Robertson who spoke, and the scene was the hotel lounge the following morning. The doctor from Chamonix had just left, after confirming his opinion of the previous evening that Jean, though less seriously hurt than was at first feared, would not be able to walk about freely for at least three weeks. She had not only sprained her ankle but had torn a ligament. Now she lay on one of the sofas, her damaged ankle bound and more comfortable, while the crisis she had innocently precipitated was discussed by the others.

'Couldn't you stay on here till she is better?' suggested Madame Duroc.

But Mrs Robertson shook her head. 'It's kind of you to suggest it, Yvonne, but you know very well the whole hotel has been booked from a week on Saturday by these people from Belgium'

'Oh, we can easily send some of them to one of the other hotels', protested M. Georges. 'That's no difficulty!'

'We might have gone to one of the other hotels ourselves if we were sure Jean would be fit for the Strasbourg journey within a reasonable time', said Mr Robertson. 'But you heard what the doctor said—at least three weeks. No, it's a pity, but it looks as if it must be Paris. If the journey north had been less complicated we might have risked it, but——' He broke off and shook his head. 'I wouldn't like to carry both you *and* the luggage, Jean!'

'But, Daddy, you know Mother and you particularly wanted to go to Strasbourg', wailed Jean. Neither David nor Leo said anything but their faces were expressive. Paris had been well enough, but they had both enjoyed themselves in the countryside

much more, and had been looking forward to seeing at least one more aspect of it before they returned to the city.

'What I can't see is why you can't put me on the train for Paris by myself and the rest of you go as you intended', went on Jean, who was very near to tears. 'I don't see why everybody's holiday should be spoiled. I'd be all right in the train. Really I would!'

But this suggestion did not at all meet with Mrs Robertson's approval and David was beginning to fear that this was indeed to be the end of their tour, when Yseult announced that she had had an inspiration. Taking Michel by the arm, she led him over to the window.

'Pardon us while we whisper!' she said. At the end of her whispering, Michel nodded his head emphatically, whereon Yseult took the middle of the room and announced that the problem was solved. 'Michel and I will take Jean back to Paris with us in the car while the rest of you carry on as arranged.'

'It's much the most sensible course', urged Michel. 'I'm sure Jean will be much more comfortable in the car than she would be in the train and as we shall be passing through country she hasn't seen yet, she might even enjoy the run. We'll see a bit of the Massif Central on the way and quite a lot of the Châteaux country, and I think you can trust us to take good care of her while we're travelling. You do trust us, don't you?'

'We're not really anything like so scatterbrained as you might think', said Yseult, earnestly—so earnestly that even Jean smiled a little. 'Do say yes, Mrs Robertson!'

'It would certainly be one way out of the difficulty', agreed Mrs Robertson, weakening a little. 'But what of your own plans? Wouldn't it mean a lot of extra trouble for you?'

'Nonsense! It'll be a pleasure', cried Yseult. 'I believe it might even stop Michel talking about Mont Blanc for a little while, and think what a relief that will be to me! Well, is it settled?'

'What do you think about it, Jean?' asked Mr Robertson.

'Oh, I would love it, Daddy!'

'Then it is settled', said Yseult, briskly. 'I won't hear another word of opposition, Mrs Robertson.' She turned to Jean. 'We'll make a real tour of it, Jean, and now we certainly will look into

Brittany after Touraine'—this last with a toss of her head at Michel who looked down at her with a grin.

'I thought you would find a way of badgering me into it', he said, and though Mrs Robertson still remained a little dubious, in the end she was won over, a letter was sent off express to Madame Draguille in Paris, informing her of the situation; and, two days later, after early breakfast, more substantial than usual as they had such a long run before them, Jean was helped out into the waiting car.

'Poor Jean!' said David, as they watched the car diminishing down the valley. 'Isn't she unlucky!'

During the remainder of their stay at Les Bossons, David, who had made friends with some boys from Chamonix, spent much of his time at the climbing-school, and both he and Leo ran up an overdraft on pocket money by their lavish expeditions on *téléférique* trips. Leo in particular developed such a passion for these contraptions, and particularly for the high-flier of the Brévent, that his father suggested he should apply for a job as cabin attendant—a proposal which Leo took very seriously. Then there were longer excursions *en famille*—the most interesting a visit to the glacier above Chamonix, the famous Mer de Glace, in the course of which they made the acquaintance of yet another form of alpine transport—the cogwheel railway ('rackety railway', David suggested, would be a better name for it).

Meanwhile, from Jean, came a telegram dispatched from Vichy, then after a gap of some days, a long letter describing her journey to that point, and about a week later, when they were preparing for their own journey north, a second letter completing the story. But these letters deserve a separate chapter.

Chapter 16

THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

JEAN'S first letter was addressed from the Hotel Châteauevue near Tours and had evidently been written on the third day of her journey. Mrs Robertson read it aloud, after breakfast, as they sprawled under a pine-tree at the foot of the Brévent.

Dear Everybody, (wrote Jean),

As you'll see from the above address we're now in the Château country of Touraine. At this moment Michel is up at the castle (I can see it from here), advising the Bold Bad Baron (only he's a natty little Count, Yseult says), how he can central-heat 'ye olde ancestral halle' from a furnace-room in the deepest, darkest dungeon, etc. And as Yseult is writing letters I thought I would be dutiful and write one too.

Well then, for a start, how are you? No more accidents, I hope? Has David been on the top of the Mont Blanc and Leo had a ride on the Brévent *téléférique* yet? I do hope you are enjoying yourselves as much as I am and that Mother hasn't been worrying about me (I know no one else will—much!). I really am having a marvellous time. I was a bit down in the dumps at leaving you that morning (Did it show? I hope not!). But you just can't be melancholy when you are with people like Michel and Yseult, and well, if anyone was worrying I herewith absolve them (is absolve right?) from all further groans, sighs, lamentations, etc. My ankle, you'll be pleased to hear, is hardly hurting at all now (except when I forget and put my weight on it which *does* happen sometimes). As for the car run, it's been heavenly, and Michel and Yseult absolutely angelic. I've seen so many different places that my head's in a whirl, and what it'll be like by the time we get to Paris (we really are going to Brittany!) I shudder to

think. Probably so completely confused that I won't be able to tell you *anything*, so here, while I still have a few wits left, are some notes by the way, which will give you some idea of our adventures. Well then, here goes!

I won't waste much ink on the first day of the run. For a good bit of the time we were on the same roads we travelled over by bus on our way from Grenoble to Chamonix, and, even after we got on to new ones, it was still the same type of scenery: high mountains, sometimes with snow on, forests of fir and pine trees, little chalets high up on the hillsides, and here and there a pretty little village, though less of these than you might have expected in so many miles. Some parts of the road, in fact, were almost deserted. However, once we started dipping down into the valleys of the Saône and the Rhône, it became very different—especially when we got near to Lyons, which instead of being the utility work-a-day place I expected (Mummy and Daddy always spoke about it as if it was *only* an industrial town), was I thought rather a handsome place, and quite picturesque too, with its bridges (*What* a lot of them there are!) over the Saône and the Rhône, and the old town up on the hill they call la Colline de Fourvières, that you see from everywhere. Incidentally, Yseult said it was up on that hill that the old hand-loom silk weavers used to live, and that instead of working indoors they used to do their weaving outside on looms-set up in front of their houses. I suppose that would only be 'weather permitting' but it sounds much nicer than working in a factory as the weavers do nowadays! By the way, I remember there was an argument once about when silk weaving actually started at Lyons. I can now inform you *definitely* that it was about the fifteenth century. But I've a long way to travel yet so I'll not say any more about Lyons.

'To continue my story', (as the writers in the Victorian books say) after leaving Lyons we crossed the Rhône (I hadn't realized it was such a *broad* river) and drove into a different kind of country altogether, the old Celtic province of Auvergne, where we went first to the capital town of Clermont-Ferrand and then to the place where what Leo used to call 'wishy-washer' comes from—the spa town of Vichy, which (let me show off my modern history!) was the capital of the Pétain Government during the

part of the last war when France was occupied by the Germans. I wish I could describe Auvergne to you properly, but it isn't easy. It's hilly—the hills are mostly called 'Puys', which I suppose corresponds to our Scots 'ben', but they are not in the least like the little hills at Fayence or the snow mountains of the Alps. Those hills of 'The Massif Central' are very old and they look it. The rock summits, instead of being sharp-pointed like those of the Alps, are often dome-shaped on top (like St Paul's or the Opéra in Paris), while others—the steeper ones—have shapes that remind you a little of the shapes made by the jet of a fountain just beginning to spout or being turned off—when the water is falling back on itself, I mean. Only these 'fountains' are of stone of course and some of them are *black*. Then besides these 'stacks' and 'domes' (Michel's words—perhaps David will know what they mean), there are numbers of extinct *volcanoes* usually with deep lakes—with fish in them!—in the craters. The extraordinary thing about most of the rocks however is their *bareness*. They really look *naked*, and the green folds of fields and woods round their feet might be rich gowns which have slipped down from their shoulders.

According to Michel this is one of the best parts of France for fishing—for trout especially. Besides the lakes in the volcanoes there are any number of rivers and streams. It's not so rich as many other parts for agriculture, though. There is a fertile plain between Clermont and Vichy, and round about Vichy, where all sorts of crops grow, and there are splendid pastures in some of the valleys, with droves of cattle, pigs, sheep, etc., and some glorious groves of chestnut-trees. But in many parts the soil is very poor and only trees grow well. The people have to work very hard to earn a living—so much so that Michel says a great many of them emigrate to the big cities, particularly to Paris, where they often become wine or coal-and-wood merchants. Yseult says they're Celts—the Auvergnats I mean—but belong to a different branch of the Celts from the Bretons. They are short, dark, and strong-looking, and speak a dialect with many Celtic words in it and a lot of 'e' endings. Once you get used to it, it's not too difficult to understand, but at first it sounds more like Italian than French.

THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN FRANCE

In Clermont-Ferrand we only stopped for a moment—to look at the cathedral. It's built of volcanic lava and is quite *black*—like jet. Some of the houses are black too (both here and in other towns and villages) and to keep up the colour scheme there's a Black Virgin in one of the churches! Altogether, though I saw so little of it, I think Clermont-Ferrand would be rather a nice place to revisit some time. Plenty of history and picturesque corners for me; mountains (the domed kind!) quite near, which would please David, and, for Leo, a big chocolate factory (next door to a mineral spring) on a little hill just on the outskirts. Incidentally the great Michelin factory is here. The tyres it makes are advertised on nearly every hoarding. There are other factories too: all light secondary industries. Somehow or other I had got it into my head they had big steel works here (perhaps because of the 'Fer' at the beginning of Ferrand), but Michel said I must be getting mixed with St Etienne, which is in this area but a good bit further south. After Le Creusot, near Dijon, St Etienne is *the* important centre of heavy industries—steel and iron—south of Paris. He said if I was seriously interested in the French 'Black Country' he would run me down there after he had finished his business in Vichy (he and Yseult are *always*, if I mention a place, wanting to whirl me off there—so much so that I'm getting afraid to speak!) but I hastily assured him that it was the French '*Green* Country' I was most interested in, so we continued on the route arranged.

And now for the spa town of Vichy. For a start it was a much bigger town than I expected, and much busier (I suppose because disordered livers, etc., aren't seasonal like bathing and winter sports!) and was simply chockful of hotels, many of which have splendid gardens. But there are gardens and parks all over the town, and especially nice ones along the banks of the River Allier, while for the evenings and bad weather there is a glittering array of theatres, concert halls, and the like, and of course (most important!) the huge bath-houses—which look rather like theatres too from the outside! The actual mineral springs (did you know that most of them are springs of *hot* water?) have stone domes (more domes!) erected over them, and all except one are situated in a big park near the river. They are supposed to be good for

all sorts of tummy troubles and most of them—the wells I mean—are connected by covered walks or arcades so that people 'taking the waters' can reach them protected from the rain (Yseult says it's often thundery here) or on very hot days, from the sun.

I asked Yseult for a joke if they hadn't a well which would put my ankle right quickly, and she said the spring called Les Célestins was good for everything, so we went along there in the car while Michel was talking business, and Yseult brought a glass of the mystic beverage out to the car. It turned out to be ordinary Vichy water of the kind they bottle and send all over the country—rather like soda water. Still it was amusing to have it straight from the volcano's mouth as it were! (though this isn't one of the hot springs).

On our way back to pick up Michel rather a nice thing happened. We had stopped by the kerb, near the river, to look at the view, and while we were standing there a pony and trap driven by a girl wearing one of the colourful local costumes (red skirt, purple-shot apron, white blouse, lace kerchief, and a dainty straw bonnet—they still *make* lace in some cottages in this part) stopped beside us, and the girl handed me in through the car window a box of crystallized fruits! I was so surprised that I could not even stammer a 'merci', only gape at her, and before I came to my senses she had driven on. She was advertising the firm that makes them, of course, (Yseult says crystallized fruits are an Auvergne speciality) but wasn't it a nice way to do it? I'll try to keep a few of the fruits she presented me with to let you taste them though they're pretty much the same as those that Mother buys sometimes.

And now I should go on and tell you about Touraine but I've written so much: I'm beginning to get writer's cramp, so you must wait for the rest of the story till my next letter. When that will be written (and where!) I won't try to guess. Meanwhile love to all from your wandering (but always affectionate),

Jean.

P.S.—Michel and Yseult send their love to you (Michel's just got back from the castle).—Love, Jean.

P.P.S.—I see my writing (and grammar) have gone off towards the end. Please accept my sprained ankle as excuse!—J.

‘Well, she doesn’t seem to be doing so badly, does she?’ remarked David as his mother finished reading. ‘I wish I could have seen those volcanoes.’

‘There are more interesting things than volcanoes in the Massif Central’, said his father. ‘That’s where they discovered the old cave-dwellings of prehistoric man.’

‘Where they found the wall paintings?’

‘That’s right. Jean wasn’t near these, however. They’re away down at the south of the Massif—not far from the Spanish border.’

‘Aren’t there an awful lot of mountains in France!’ remarked Leo. ‘When I used to see France in my head—before we came here—it was always flat, like a greeny-yellow table-cover—with church spires sticking up all over like salt and pepper sprinklers!’

‘I suppose you got that idea because most of the pictures we see of France in books and newspapers are of the north’, said his father, when they had finished laughing at Leo’s image. ‘In fact, France is an extremely mountainous country with hills in nearly every region—even in Brittany, for all Yseult says! If you want to make a rough picture of France in your mind you should think of it as a wedge of cheese, Leo. The Alps where we are now is the thick side of the wedge; the thin side slips into the channel and the Bay of Biscay.’

‘What about the Pyrénées?’ demanded David. ‘They rather spoil the wedge idea, don’t they?’

‘Yes, they do rather upset the symmetry’, agreed his father. ‘Unless we say they’re a bit of the cheese crust left sticking up at the south side of the thin edge. And of course the cheese is pretty deeply cut and grooved in places’, he added.

‘Like gruyère’, said Mrs Robertson, absently.

‘If it was gruyère’, said Leo, ‘then the little bubbles in the middle part could be the craters of Jean’s volcanoes.’

Jean’s second letter, addressed from Madame Draguille’s flat

in the Rue de l'Arc de Triomphe, was even longer than her first. It ran as follows:

Dear Everybody,

After the *voluminous* letter I wrote from Touraine I naturally expected to find *stacks* of letters from you awaiting me when I arrived at Paris, whereas all I found was one single postcard with exactly twenty-three words written on it, which I considered such a complete swindle that I almost decided not to tell you a *thing* about the rest of my tour! However, just in case it's not you but the post to blame (Isn't it awful the time they take sometimes?) I have decided to be magnanimous and continue the true (if somewhat sketchy) account of your affectionate daughter (and sister)'s travels, excursions, adventures, misadventures, etc., between Les Bossons and the Rue de L'Arc de Triomphe, where she was delivered, safe and (comparatively) sound, late yesterday evening by the trusty Michel and Yseult. It will be a pretty long story, but Cécile has promised to stay me with coffee, and I have the whole afternoon and evening before me (it's raining to-day), SO. . . .

I think Vichy was the last place I told you about. Well, after leaving there, we drove north through a little town called Moulins (where Henry IV was married) and on by St Pierre-le-Moutier (which Jeanne d'Arc captured in 1429) till we came to the town of Nevers, where I had my first glimpse of the River Loire—a broad *leisurely* river simply made, according to Yseult, 'to reflect château towers in!' At Nevers, however, it wasn't château towers it was reflecting but the buildings along the quays, and most of all, the arches of the old bridge—at least fourteen—which gives you, I hope, ~~some~~ idea of the breadth of this river. According to Michel and Yseult it continues broad and slow like this all the way through the château country till it flows into the sea at the south of Brittany.

Nevers has a fine cathedral, a beautiful old gate called the Porte du Croux, and an old ducal palace. Yours truly, nobly supported by Michel and Yseult, hopped first into the museum to see the best of a *magnificent* collection of locally made pottery (*salence*, it's called; is that how *our* Fayence got its name?) and

then into a nearby shop to buy a bowl (very pretty) for mother as a souvenir.

After Nevers we turned west for Tours. And now we were in the real châteaux country, 'the garden of France' as they call it. If this *isn't* the richest part of France it certainly looks it! It really is like a great sprawling garden—if you can imagine a garden where the shrubberies are fair-sized woods, the sun-houses and tool-sheds are castles and fine houses, and the flower-pots are as big as fields! And, like a garden, it's full of diversity. Though the big estates are mostly near the river there are heaps of little ones everywhere, and these, with their parks and woodlands, break up the countryside in the most delightful way. There's something new to see at every corner—now a fine old wood with a blue shimmer of wild hyacinths under the trees; next a ragged but fruitful looking orchard with apples and pears, plums, apricots, cherries, and I don't know what else, growing (and a string of white geese raising their heads to gobble at you usually); now a large meadow with fat cows and sheep (sometimes a flock of hens or a goat or two); now a vineyard; now a wheatfield; now a village of neat white houses with a church spire rising above them; and then more woods again, or another château, so that you begin to feel that this 'sleepy profusion of riches' (that's the nearest I can come to it, I think) goes on for ever and ever.

Touraine's appearance of being 'a land of milk and honey' (there are bee-hives everywhere, by the way), isn't a false one. Michel says that life is so much easier here that the countryfolk live longer in Touraine than in any other part of France, and we certainly saw heaps of very bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked (if toothless!) old gaffers and dames in the streets of the villages. He also says that anyone who is *really* good at slipping through fences and climbing over walls and running off quickly when challenged, can get a very good living in Touraine 'off the country'. There are lots of fish in the Loire, heaps of waterfowl (and snakes too!) on its sandy islands, crayfish in the streams, and rabbits, all sorts of gamebirds, and even wild pigs in the woods (if we get broke travelling we might keep this in mind I think. I admit I can't picture myself chasing a wild

THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

pig with a carving-knife, but I'm sure David and Leo would be delighted!).

But I must get on with the story, and the next place I have to tell you about is Tours, where we found the Loire again, broader, shallower, and even lazier-looking than when we saw it at Nevers, with lots of low sandbanks showing.

Tours, as you know, is one of the French towns I particularly wanted to see because of Walter Scott's *Quentin Durward*, and Balzac's *Curé de Tours*. And also, of course, because my favourite saint (after Jeanne d'Arc!) is St Martin, who when he was still a dashing young Roman legionary, tore his fine cloak in half to give part of it to a shivering old beggarman and later became Bishop here. Well I won't say I would have recognized the district from *Quentin Durward*—the Château de Plessis-les-Tours was a real disappointment (of the old part only a tiny bit is left and the rest looks comparatively modern)—but I could see quite a bit of Balzac's Tours yet (despite all the commercial buildings), especially round the beautiful old cathedral and near the river, where there are dozens of delightful old houses. The house that interested *me* most, of course, was the one in the Rue Nationale (number 39!) where the great Balzac was born in 1799, and we also made a pious pilgrimage to pay our respects to his statue near the Hôtel de Ville. There were also statues to Descartes and Rabelais, who, I now learned from Yseult, were both Tourangeaux—as they call the natives of Touraine. Two of France's greatest writers and one of the greatest of its philosophers all from this same part! That shows how rich Touraine is, doesn't it? As for the general appearance of the town—apart from its fascinating associations, I think pleasant is the right word. In fact it's rather like some of the English cathedral towns, and is mostly residential. Yseult says that before the war there used to be quite a big English colony here. 'Because the people in Tours talk so slowly!' was Michel's explanation. He was joking, of course, but it is true about the way they speak. 'Reg'lar Zummerz-zum of them are.'

We didn't stay in Tours but in a tiny village a few miles away, just beside Michel's château—or, rather, the one he had the job to do at! This wasn't one of the famous ones but as it looked

rather nice I'll describe it to you. It was built of the very light local stone which looks almost as white as marble when the sun shines on it and consisted of three parts: the old part—a great roughish round tower with the tiniest of windows, which went up for three storeys where it burgeoned out into a heavy balcony, after which it continued for one storey more to finish in a cone-shaped turret; next, built on to the back of this tower (and using it as one corner) was a high squarish block of buildings (four storeys and attics with tall narrow windows); and from the side and back of this rose yet another and still more modern wing, with squarish windows and a sort of cloister on the first floor. The roofs were steep-pitched and four-sided (with a flat bit on the top of each, I think, though I'm not sure of that) and instead of a lot of separate chimneys there were about a dozen tall stone ones rising just above the tops of the roofs. The whole building except the round tower was set up on a sort of rocky platform—part natural and part artificial. At the edge of this was a balcony with steps going down on the one side towards a formal garden with gravelled walks and severely clipped hedges and shrubs, and on the other to a nice park which sloped down to the reedy bank of a slow and rather muddy stream where swans were floating. All around were clumps of woodland. Have I made you see it, I wonder? I thought it looked rather nice personally though of course it's a very small *château* compared with the really famous ones like Chambord, its roof bristling like a shipyard with turrets and spires, or Chaumont with its enormous gateway towers. But you need Balzac (or a photograph!)* to do justice to these splendours. I must get to Brittany or this letter really *will* be as long as the Human Comedy—and probably end up the same way, unfinished!

From Tours we went in the same direction as the Loire as far as Angers, where I hopped out of the car to see the lovely old tapestries in the cathedral. I didn't, however, try to get up on 'the frowning ramparts' of King René's castle which, with its seventeen huge round towers, dominates everything here, as Yseult said that the outside was much the best of it! There was, however, another castle in the neighbourhood (twenty miles further

* There *is* a photograph of a *château*, opposite page 112. Author.

down the river) which I would have liked dearly to see—the original Bluebeard's one! According to Yseult (who has a story about everything here) Bluebeard really existed. His name was Gilles de Laval, Lord of Retz, and he was a Breton nobleman of such magnificence that he lived even more luxuriously than the King of France (500 people to dinner every day!) until, needing more money, he took up alchemy and sorcery by which he hoped to turn base metals into gold. He sent messengers all over Europe to invite famous alchemists to come to his Castle of Champtocé. One of these told him that a human sacrifice was necessary to work the trick, and in the course of the experiments first one child and then another was murdered until more than a hundred had been killed before the Duke of Brittany heard of the crimes and had him arrested and executed. Yseult says that the country-people (some of them anyway!) still believe that on certain nights the body of Gilles, surrounded with flames, and sometimes accompanied by the ghosts of the murdered children, appears on the castle walls!

However, our route lay not south-west but west, and so it was not Bluebeard's Castle I saw next but the old capital of Brittany—Rennes, which (though of course I didn't *dare* to even hint at this to Yseult) did not impress me very much, except the bits round the cathedral. I learned, later, that this was the original Rennes, and the only part of the town which wasn't destroyed in a great fire about 1720. However, if the streets of Rennes weren't exciting, the people walking about them were very interesting indeed. Quite a number of them—women mostly—were wearing the Breton national costume—a long black dress with voluminous skirts, a tight bodice, and very wide sleeves, and a pretty lace cap (sometimes close on the head, sometimes—the nicest kind—going up to a high peak in front), and there were any number of monks and nuns—some of the monks wearing sandals. At one place we were held up by a walking funeral in which monks, dressed in long brown habits, were carrying the coffin on a sort of bier resting on their shoulders. They did not seem at all *melancholy* and as they passed they looked at us just as curiously as we looked at them!

It was after we left Rennes, however, on our way to St Malo,

that we began to see the *real* Brittany, and there is no doubt it is quite a separate country, as different from, say, Touraine as Scotland is from England. Instead of lush meadows and fertile fields great stretches of heathery moorlands with grey rocks thrusting through the soil; instead of great châteaux, little straggling villages or bright little fisher-towns; instead of rich sprawling farms, tiny little crofts, with some fields—growing oats or rye!—no larger than our garden at home; big Celtic crosses here and there (*exactly* like those in our own highlands!) and in every churchyard, set up in prominent places, huge crucifixes (calvaries as they call them). Most of the people in Brittany, Yseult told me, are fishermen or farmers. They send great loads of fish and vegetables to Paris every day. The people are for the most part poor, hard-working, and very pious, and all their great popular celebrations are religious—the Breton ‘Pardons’ they are called. But there are hundreds and hundreds of little fêtes too—Saint day celebrations, etc., etc. We saw one of these (a very pretty one) while on our way to the coast. In this case (which I believe is unusual!) two neighbouring villages who shared the same saint were having a joint celebration, and as part of it the priest walked on a beautiful carpet made out of *flower petals* (yes, really) followed by his white-clad choir boys all the way from the church in one village to the market-place of the other, where an altar had been set up in the open air and where a service was held. White sheets and banners were hung out of the windows of nearly all the houses along the route, and as the procession went past, carrying the Holy Vessels, the people lining the streets knelt down on the stones to show their respect. I must say it was very impressive—and jolly, too, afterwards when the bells started ringing and the people relaxed—especially when some Breton musicians arrived—fife and *binou* players! The ‘binou’ is the Breton bagpipe but it’s a very squeaky one compared with ours. These players incidentally (and some of the people at the fête too) were wearing the national costume. The men’s one is very amusing; a comic flat hat (something like those that English clergymen wear, but with ribbons hanging down behind!), black trousers, and a short jacket cut away to show a black velvet waistcoat (gorgeously embroidered with bright red, gold, etc.).

THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

St Malo, where we stayed a night with Yseult's parents, had been knocked about so badly during the war that there was hardly anything picturesque left except the ramparts. But though it will never be the same (as Yseult's father remarked sadly), there is building going on all over the place, and at least its situation and its magnificent harbour (which *is* picturesque) remain as fine as ever.

What really interested me here was to see *inside* a real Breton house. Yseult's parents are very patriotic. Her father, who is a lawyer, by the way, says that Brittany should have Home Rule! Her mother comes from a tiny island called Bréhat, where the lanes are so narrow that there is not a single cart, let alone a motor-car, on it. Their house is furnished in the Breton style. The beds were *very* curious—like huge wardrobes, but with sliding shutters instead of doors. The one I had was covered all over with carvings done by hand, and nearly all the other pieces of furniture were carved too, some with abstract designs, others with quite elaborate farming and fishing scenes.

I could go on telling you about Brittany for ages—about the standing stones (Druid stones) on the lonely moors; about the innumerable islands, including the wild Île de Sein where life is so harsh and people make such a poor living that no one who lives there is asked to pay taxes, and where death by drowning is so common that the women wear mourning *all* the time; about the *enormous* quantity of shellfish that I had at dinner; and a hundred other things besides, but as my wrist's already hurting a lot more than my ankle ever did, I'm going to skip the rest, because I want to tell you about one other place we visited—the following day, before we returned to Paris. Can you guess what it was? Yes, Mont-Saint-Michel—the island fortress-monastery, a little way off the coast where Brittany and Normandy meet.

Mont-Saint-Michel really was a thrill even though I only saw it from the foot (we *drove* to it in the car at low tide over a stone causeway which is covered at high water). It is a great granite crag three thousand feet round and no less than one hundred and sixty feet in height, terribly steep (positively precipitous) in some places, and the whole top of it is covered by the Abbey buildings,

which pile up tower behind tower, battlement behind battlement, till they reach a climax in a slender central spire. On the south-east side of the rock, which is less precipitous, there is a tiny little town with innumerable cafés and souvenir shops. The whole, abbey and town, is enclosed by a thick high wall with just one gate in it, and there is only one street, leading up from this gate (and getting steeper and steeper the further you go up) until you reach the *donjon* of the fortress.

I would dearly have loved to go up to the top but both Michel and Yseult said it would be much too tiring for my ankle so instead we went to one of the cafés, and while we ate Breton *crêpes dentelle* (very thin 'lace-like' pancakes—they eat them all over Brittany) and drank coffee, watched the modern 'pilgrims' who come in charabancs, going in and out of the souvenir shops and trudging off up the steep track to the abbey far above. They seemed very 'cheery' pilgrims to me but Michel says that the medieval pilgrims were probably very much the same, and when you think of Chaucer and *his* pilgrims he was probably right. Yseult says, incidentally, that Mont-Saint-Michel was a sacred place of pilgrimage even before the coming of Christianity—only it was Druid, not Catholic, priests then! For myself I found it hard to think of it as an Abbey: it has so much the look of a war-like castle, and, as Yseult pointed out, the old monks who lived here were of a very war-like order. They sent six ships to help William the Conqueror in his attack on England and after the Conquest were given heaps of loot by William as a reward for their help.

Our drive from St Michel back to Paris I must leave to your imagination, for I really cannot write another line. I'm quite exhausted and so, I see, is most of Grandmère's writing paper! So till I see you next,

Yours very affectionately,
Jean.

P.S.—Cécile says I'll have to send this letter by *parcel* post—there's so many pages! Oh, and one thing more. Perhaps I shouldn't ~~say~~ anything in case it doesn't come off, but just on the chance that it does, prepare yourselves for a real shock when you arrive at Strasbourg.—J

THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

'What does *that* mean?' asked David as his mother laid down the last sheet of the letter. 'Why should we get a shock when we go to Strasbourg?'

Mrs Robertson shook her head. 'I haven't the faintest idea, David.'

Chapter 17

AN S O S FROM A SPIRE

PARIS is the centre of the French railway network. Out from Paris, to every point of the compass, radiate the trunk lines along which rush such famous *rapides* as Le Train Bleu and the Simplon-Orient Express. In addition to these main lines, however, there are thousands of miles of cross-country tracks, one of the most important of which connects the river port of Bordeaux in the south-west with Strasbourg in the east. It was on this line, after a preliminary journey which brought them at one point quite close to the Swiss frontier, that the depleted Robertson family travelled to Alsace, a route which took them first through the cheese-making Jura, a region of rich pastures, dark forests, and steep grassy slopes topped by crumbling cliffs, then down the centre of the fruitful Alsatian plain with the Rhine on their right hand and the tree-tufted cones and domes of the Vosges on their left.

At the Gare Centrale in Strasbourg, Tante Marie and her husband, Hansi Stoecklin, who was a notary by profession, were waiting to welcome them.

Uncle Hansi's car—a glossy new Renault—was parked on the semicircular *Place* in front of the station, a rather bleak expanse overlooked by the ponderous, stiff-fronted, stone buildings of the neo-Gothic 'New Town'.

'We'll leave the sight-seeing for another day', he said to David, who was sitting beside him, as he turned the car into the stream of hooting and clanging traffic through the city centre. 'Anyway, this part of Strasbourg is rather dull. The interesting quarter is down by the river and the Cathedral.'

'You don't live right in the town, do you, Uncle Hansi?'

'No, we're just outside it, on the road to Sesenheim. Ah, here's

our corner.' Entering a wide boulevard where there was less traffic he stepped on the accelerator, raced through the last of the built-up area, then, turning off the main road, he drew up in front of a modernized Alsatian farmhouse, with white walls, heavy dark timbering, and pots of geraniums on every window-sill. 'Here we are now!'

'Well, have you prepared them for the surprise?' he chuckled to his wife as he threw open the rear door.

'Not yet. I was afraid to speak in case I let the whole secret out', confessed Tante Marie.

'What is this surprise?' demanded Mrs Robertson suspiciously. 'Jean wrote that we might get one when we arrived here and I've been fretting about it ever since!'

'You'll find it in the living-room', twinkled her brother-in-law, and bowed her through a dark passage into a long narrow room with a green-tiled stove in the corner. At the far end of the room a girl wearing a red jersey and a blue skirt was curled up on a window-seat.

'Hullo, Mother! Surprised to see me?'

'Jean! How did you get here?' gasped Mrs Robertson.

'Michel and Yseult brought me. Michel had to go to Nancy for a consultation, so Yseult suggested they might drop me here "on his way". Of course, I jumped at the chance!'

'But your ankle?' cried her father. 'Is it all right now?'

'Grandmère's doctor fixed it. It's fine, so long as I don't try to walk too far.'

Next morning Mr Robertson, Jean, David, and Leo drove into Strasbourg with Uncle Hansi, who dropped them on the Place Broglie, by the Palace of Rohan, on his way to his office.

'Take care when you're at the Cathedral', he warned them, as they got out of the car. 'There's a lot of "ill" down there!' With a wave of a plump white hand he drove off.

'What's the joke?' asked Jean.

Mr Robertson grinned. 'That's a piece of Alsatian humour, Jean. He's making a pun in two languages: Alsatian and English. The Ill's a river. One arm of it runs by Petite France and the Cathedral. The Alsations make a lot of puns.'

'Alsatian's a sort of German, isn't it?' said David, as they walked down the Rue du Dôme.

'It belongs to the German group of languages. But it's almost as different from standard German as the Scots used by Burns is from the English of Tennyson. And the Alsatians aren't German; they're a mixture. The original inhabitants of Alsace were Celts. After the Celts the Franks came, and after them, the Teutons. You can find traces of all three peoples in Alsatian culture, but temperamentally the Alsatians are more French than anything else. When Alsace was taken from France by Prussia after the Franco-Prussian War they were so unhappy about it that over forty thousand of them left their homes rather than accept German nationality, and after the 1914-18 War, when Alsace was recovered by France nearly everyone was delighted. Indeed, in some ways, the Alsatians are *more* French than the hundred per cent Franks—perhaps because they became French citizens of their own free will! It's worth remembering that it was in Alsace, in this city, that Rouget de Lisle composed *The Marseillaise*.'

'Oh. Then how did it get called *The Marseillaise*?' asked Jean.

'Because it was revolutionary soldiers from Marseilles who first adopted it as a marching song', replied her father. 'But look, here's the Cathedral.'

The Cathedral was rose-red in colour, and towered above the old houses of the street around like a high-masted ship above a flotilla of rowing-boats. Standing on the paved *Place* by the mighty buttresses they had to gaze almost straight up to see the tip of the slender, sky-seeking spire.

'It's almost like looking up at Mont Blanc!' exclaimed David. 'How far can you get up it?'

'Right up until you're standing under the roofing stone. But very few people climb so far. It's not only hard work—there are six hundred and twenty-five steps—but, as Victor Hugo writes somewhere, when you are up on the top you can actually feel the spire swaying and vibrating in the wind. It's quite frightening.'

'Have you been up?' asked Jean.

'Once. And I was very glad to get down again! Though I suppose it must be firm enough, since it's been standing for five hundred years.'

'Is that when the cathedral was built? It looks much order.'

'Most of it is. The spire's modern compared to the rest. Part of the main structure dates from the beginning of the twelfth century. But let's go in. It's almost ten and I want Leo to see the astronomical clock performing.'

The clock was in a railed-off space near the door. Beyond it the nave of the cathedral stretched away, vast and mysterious, like a forest aisle. Three priests, their vestments flapping, their hands folded behind their backs, were walking slowly up and down, now and then exchanging a word, their faces now blue, now red, now yellow, as they passed in and out of the shafts of coloured light from the windows. Tall white candles burned before the images. Sometimes a man or woman hurried in, knelt down, muttered a prayer, and hurried out again. A lady in black and a young soldier stood near the clock. Nearby a woman sold votive candles.

'Is it *all* clock?' whispered Leo, incredulously.

'Yes. Rather different from the one at home, isn't it?'

The clock did not look like a clock. It looked like the façade of a miniature Gothic cathedral, and, like a Gothic cathedral, it was ornamented with carvings of people and animals. It had not one dial but many, and showed, besides the time of the day, the month of the year, the eclipses of the sun and the moon, the courses of the planets, and the succession of the church feasts. As they watched, the hands moved to the hour of ten.

'Now comes the performance', whispered Mr Robertson, and as he spoke there was a loud whirr of machinery and while the chimes boomed in the roof above little figures on the clock came to jerky life. A door in the clock-face opened and a medieval procession marched out and in again. A metal cock crowed.

'Well, what do you think of that, Leo?' asked Mr Robertson, as the whirring died down, and the little robots became still again.

'It's lovely!' marvelled Leo. 'Is it awfully old?' he asked.

'Parts of it. This is a replica—as near as they could make it—of a clock made by a famous sixteenth-century clock-maker called Daspodius. They say the original clock was even more wonderful. Indeed, the story goes that it was so marvellous that when

Daspodius had finished it, the rulers of Strasbourg put out his eyes to prevent him ever making another.'

'Is that true?' cried Jean, horrified.

'It was told to me as a true story, though I've never seen it written down anywhere. People *were* very cruel in those days, you know, and not only in Alsace either!' He turned to David. 'Still want to go up the tower, David?'

David grinned. 'You bet!'

'What about you, Jean? Perhaps you'd rather stay down here and rest your ankle?'

Jean hesitated. 'Well, that's what I meant to do. But after that story I need some air. I'll come up part of the way with you.'

'If David's going right up, I am too,' announced Leo. 'It can't be higher than the Brévent *téléférique*.'

'No, but there's less to stand on!' retorted his father.

The first stage of the climb took them out on a platform at roof level and the base of the spire. Already they were twice as high as the neighbouring houses, and the old city with its canals, bridges, narrow twisting streets, and ancient houses, was spread out beneath them like a relief map. Further afield they could see the greeny ribbon of the Rhine and a blue-black cloud that Mr Robertson said was the Black Forest. South and west the view ranged the Vosges from Haut-Barr to St Odile.

'Still feel you want to go higher up?' Mr Robertson asked David, mockingly.

David looked up at the spire which soared above them as high again as the platform on which they were standing. Its stonework was like lace and the light of the sky showed through it. It looked extremely fragile. David licked his lips, then drew a deep breath.

'Well, I said I would do it!' he said. He turned to Leo. 'Coming?'

Leo gulped. 'L-lead on Mac-MacDuff!' he agreed gamely, (misquoting as usual).

David 'led on'. They disappeared into the dark entrance of the tower, and Jean and her father sat down on a nearby seat to await their return.

'We may as well make ourselves comfortable', chuckled Mr Robertson. 'They've got quite a climb in front of them, if they really go up to the top!'

'What's that big building over there?' asked Jean.

'Over the hill? That's the University. It's a very famous one. Goethe, the author of *Faust*, studied there. But I suppose you knew he has many associations with Strasbourg.'

'Yes. He had something to do with Sesenheim, too, hadn't he?'

'He probably walked past Marie and Hansi's house many times—when it was still a farm, of course. Frederica Brion, the Alsatian girl who inspired some of his finest songs—including the *Röslein*, *Röslein*—the one your friend Dorothy sang at your last school concert—lived at Sesenheim. She was the daughter of the village pastor and very beautiful. Goethe fell in love with her for a while but in the end he left Frederica, and when next he returned to Alsace he was married to the daughter of a rich banker.'

'Poor Frederica!'

'Poor Frederica, indeed. When Goethe said good-bye she almost died. The *Röslein* song's really a disguised version of the story. Goethe was the *Knabe*—the boy; Frederica the *Röslein*. The house at Sesenheim where she lived has been reconstructed, but you can still see the garden where they met. Some people think that the garden scene in *Faust*, where Gretchen tells Faust about her simple life, was based on their meetings there.'

'Has anyone else famous lived here?'

'Oh, yes, many famous people. Pasteur—the pioneer of modern medicine—had a house here. Then there was General Kléber, the first great soldier produced by the French Revolution. He was a native of Strasbourg. And Gutenberg did a lot of his work here.'

'The German who was one of the first printers?'

'That's right.' He flung up his head suddenly. 'What was that, Jean?' Something had struck the platform and, rebounding, pinged against the parapet.

Jean picked it up. It was a two-franc piece. She looked up at the spire and saw something white fluttering at one of the apertures, very near the top. 'It's David and Leo! They must have thrown it down to make us look up!'

'Silly asses', grunted her father, rising. Then his eyes narrowed. 'What on earth are they trying to do now?'

The handkerchief was being thrust in and out of the spire at purposeful intervals.

THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN FRANCE

'It almost looks as though they were trying to signal to us', said Jean. 'Dot-dot-dot dash-dash-dash—Why, it's the morse code! It's an SOS.! They must be in trouble.'

'Trying to be funny, probably', grunted her father. But he looked worried. 'Wait here and I'll see.' He hurried over to the entrance of the spire and quickly climbed the narrow stair. Near the top he met David.

'Thank goodness you've come, Dad! It's Leo. He got dizzy, and now he won't move. I didn't like to leave him.'

Leo was sitting on the fourth step from the top of the spire. He looked as sick as Jean had been on the crossing to Dieppe.

'Feeling bad, Leo?' asked Mr Robertson, casually.

Leo nodded. 'When I get up the spire swings about like anything', he complained.

'Well, you can't stay here for the rest of your life, old man. Let's see if we can't get you down a few steps, at any rate. If it's better when your eyes are shut, keep them shut'. He nodded to David. 'Get above him, David.'

David did so, and sandwiched between them they got Leo down to a broader part of the stair, where Jean met them.

'Poor Leo', she sympathized. 'I'm sure I'd have got stuck too. It must be terrifying up there.'

'It was rather', admitted Leo, who was beginning to feel a little better. 'It wasn't the height. It was going round and round so much and those holes in the wall!' He shuddered. 'I felt sure I would step right out of one of them.'

They had a lunch of boiled sausages, salad, and bread and cheese in a restaurant near the canal. It was a tiny place, with a fat blue-and-white-tiled stove bulging in one corner, small windows with leaded panes, and a lot of dark woodwork carved with fantastic faces, animals, birds, trees, and scenes from Alsatian village life. The other patrons were all men. They looked like skilled workmen. They wore their hair very short, their faces were bronzed, and their features blunt but decisively moulded.

They did not talk much and when they did it was always in dialect. They were drinking beer.

'Don't they like wine up here?' Jean whispered.

'Oh yes, but most Alsations prefer beer. They export most of their wine.'

'What else does Alsace produce?' asked David.

'Timber for one thing. Fir-trees from the forests of the Vosges and oaks from the valleys and plains.'

'Yes, I noticed there were an awful lot of oaks round Uncle Hansi's house', nodded David.

'You'll find them all over the plain. Alsatian oak is famous. It has a very fine grain and makes splendid furniture. But, of course, there are even more firs than oaks.'

'Anything else?'

Mr Robertson thought. 'Let's see. There are oil wells at Pechelbronn; cotton mills at Mulhouse and then, very important, the potash mines. The potash deposits were only discovered in 1904 and while Alsace was under German rule they weren't exploited much, but to-day they're among the most productive potash mines in the world.' He signed to the waiter. 'And now, what's the next item on the programme? Shall we take a look at the new town? The Botanic Gardens are worth seeing.'

'Could we go to the Rhine, please?' begged Leo.

Mr Robertson looked at his watch. 'Well, not to stay. We've got to meet Uncle Hansi, you know. But we could have a quick look at it if you really want to, and go back again some other day. That all right?'

That was entirely satisfactory.

The Rhine was a roaring green flood, about as broad as the Thames at Kingston, flowing between a straggling Alsatian village on the French side and the bustling little manufacturing town of Kehl on the German. Connecting the two was the International Bridge, with a golden Gallic cock over the entrance on the French side and soldiers lounging near the customs house. Below the bridge they could see some traffic of small river-boats, going swiftly down and battling slowly up against the racing current, and, by the quays of Kehl, a string of barges was being unloaded.

It was strange to think that the men carrying bulging sacks along the quay were German; the shops in the streets behind, German shops; the crop-headed boys and the little fair girl in the

short white frock staring at them from the opposite tow-path, German children.

'They don't look foreign at all', exclaimed David. 'And I don't see any difference between the houses over there and those on this side either. Do you, Jean?'

'No, they look just the same. Is it really so different over there, Daddy?'

Mr Robertson smiled. 'You'd certainly find it so if you lived there. It's true the climate and type of country are the same on both sides of the river, but the Rhine is a very real dividing line. The people over there have quite different customs and traditions from those of the Alsations; even their language is different. You won't find any dialect spoken in Kehl. Everyone there speaks German and the language they use determines for most people how they think.'

'All the same they must have all the fundamental things in common', said Jean frowning. 'Isn't it queer to think that whether you were on the French or the German side in the last war depended mostly on which side of this river you were born? It makes it seem awfully accidental, if you see what I mean!'

'I do indeed. I see you're becoming "frontier conscious", Jean. That's how Kehl affects many people.'

Chapter 18

PLEASURES AND PALACES

THEY had planned a stay of ten days in Alsace, but as the weather broke the day after Leo's adventure on the spire, and rain—it can be very rainy in Alsace—kept them indoors for the greater part of two days, they extended their visit to a fortnight.

In the end, though none of the youngsters fell in love with this land of canals and plum-trees, of neat villages and carefully tended fields, of green forests and rushing streams, of historic cities and kindly independent people, they found much more to interest them than their first impressions had led them to expect, and when the hour of their departure arrived it found them very reluctant to leave.

'It's the sort of place that *grows* on you', was David's considered verdict, as the train rattled them through the Vosges on the first stage of the seven-hour journey back to Paris. 'At first it seems pretty ordinary—compared with the Var and Chamonix, I mean—but the longer you stay the more surprises you get.'

'Like finding a place like Petite France in the same town as the buildings round about the station', said Jean. 'Or the storks at Sélestat, just when we were beginning to think we'd never see any!'

Past the Vosges their route lay over the plain of Lorraine to the beautiful old city of Nancy, which is famed for its ornamental ironwork and its association with an ex-King of Poland, King Stanislas, who, when he was driven from his own throne, was created Duke of Lorraine by his son-in-law, Louis XV. Toul, a once powerful fortress town followed, and then they entered on an entirely new region, the clay country of the Marne, a land of low hills patched with small but prosperous-looking farms and vineyards. After the Marne followed the rolling chalklands of

Champagne, with the famous vineyards where the grapes from which the sparkling wine of this name is produced. Then Champagne in its turn gave place to the fertile plain of La Brie (which gives its name to a tasty cheese), where they saw the largest wheat-fields they had encountered so far.

'What surprises me', said Jean, 'is that there are so few factories. I saw hardly any on the way to Strasbourg but I thought that was because Michel was dodging them. I expected lots near the railway line.'

'Most of the industrial parts are further north and east', explained her mother. 'The iron mines of Lorraine are right up by the frontier with Luxembourg; the coal mines further north still by the Belgian frontier. There's not much coal unfortunately. Not nearly enough for the needs of the country. It used to be imported from Wales and Germany, but now it nearly all comes from Germany. France is still mainly an agricultural country: *Un pays de blé et de vin.*'

'A land of wheat and wine', repeated Jean, happily. 'What a lovely description. It's like a line of poetry.'

Paris that day was a different city from that at which they had arrived nearly three months before. Then it had been night and a snowstorm. Now it was day, the sun warm, the sky blue. Then the black twigs of the boulevard trees had borne only snow-blossoms. Now they were cloaked with leaves and the scarred trunks rose out of pools of inky shadow. Then the life of the cafés had been all indoors. Now white-aproned *garçons* ran about balancing trays on their open hands, to supply the customers at the tables that spilled far out over the *trottoirs*. Then ladies in the streets had been muffled in furs. Now they wore light summer dresses and carried sunshades. Instead of the sharp smell of frost there was a smell of tar and petrol. Street vendors cried their wares at every other corner. Sun-awnings slanted above windows. Open horse-cabs loaded with English and American tourists clip-clopped among cars with sun-roofs drawn back and hoods folded. Then the great harbour places had seemed overcrowded. Now, as they hooted their way through the crowds milling about the Opéra, they realized that the winter Paris they had known had been a half empty city.

PLEASURES AND PALACES

'Gosh, Jean, we'll have to do our sight-seeing all over again!' cried David as they swept up in the lift to Madame Draguille's flat. 'Why didn't you tell us it all looked so different in the sunshine?'

'Because I wanted you to be surprised too', laughed Jean. 'It's silly, but when I came back here with Michel and Yseult I expected to find the snow still lying—everything pretty much the same as when we left. When I saw the colours I could hardly believe my eyes. But it's even jollier like this, isn't it?'

'I should say so! I say, we'll be able to go swimming in the Seine now!'

'We'll be able to do everything!'

The lift stopped. Cécile was waiting for them on the landing. She had a *saucisson* which Mrs Robertson had brought from Strasbourg in her hand and looked more like Marianne than ever. She thrust at them with the *saucisson* so that they jerked back and upright.

'*Alors!* Stay like that!'

'Well?' giggled Jean. 'Are we fatter?'

'Perhaps just a little bit fatter', admitted Cécile, grudgingly. 'Mais Mon Dieu! What *asperges* you are! *La bonne chère* of France is just wasted on you! Leo only knows how to benefit.'

'Well we're ready to benefit now!' grinned David. 'We're starving, Cécile. We haven't eaten for two hours!'

'Two hours!' Cécile shut her eyes in horror. '*Mes pauvres enfants! Entrez! Entrez!*' Beating them over the shoulders with the *saucisson* she drove them indoors.

Pierre and Jacqueline came to dinner. They were going to a cinema and suggested that David, Jean, and Leo might accompany them. Mrs Robertson said it would be too late for Leo, but that Jean and David could go, provided they came straight back afterwards.

'Don't worry', said Pierre wryly. 'We're out on that condition, too!'

The cinema was only a few streets away. It was a small house which ran a programme of revivals, and the main feature that

evening was an early René Clair film *Le Quatorze Juillet* showing Paris at its gayest on the national holiday when there is dancing in the streets to celebrate the fall of the Bastille.

'Ah, but wait till you see the real thing', said Pierre. 'The fourteenth of July really is great fun if you can stand the racket. There's not only dancing in the streets. There are open-air concerts—the main one in La Place de la Concorde—official ceremonies at the Arc de Triomphe and in the Place de la Bastille and of course *divertissements*—circus shows, shooting galleries, swings, roundabouts, fortune-tellers, cake and candy stalls—all over the place. I suppose you will be here then?'

'I'm afraid not', replied Jean, regretfully. 'We're going home at the beginning of June, I believe.'

'But you've seen hardly anything of Paris yet.'

'Well, we're hoping to see quite a lot in the next few weeks'.

Le Quatorze Juillet was followed by two cartoons, one French, one American, and these by an unusual under-water film showing the sea life of the Mediterranean.

'Well, there's nothing wrong with the French film industry if it makes pictures like *Quatorze Juillet*', said Jean, as they left the cinema. 'And it's so simple too! All the best parts of it were set in real places and dealt with real people.'

'Most of our good films are like that', agreed Pierre. 'But of course we have a lot of purely commercial stuff too—farcical comedies about army conscripts, screen versions of popular novels and plays, and so on. But we can't really compete with America in that field.'

During their last weeks in France the Robertson youngsters went to many other entertainments.

They saw Molière's funniest comedy *Le Malade Imaginaire* at the Comédie Française, and a production of *Faust* (in which Jean was pleased to find the stage garden recognizably like the garden of Pastor Brion's house at Sesenheim) at the Opéra. They went to the Opéra Comique and to a ballet performance in the theatre in the Champs Élysées, and to several more film shows. They were surprised to learn that not only the Comédie Française,

PLEASURES AND PALACES

but other famous Parisian theatres, the Odéon, the Opéra, and the Opéra Comique, were all subsidized by the French Government. 'To keep the prices low and let everyone see the classics', explained Madame Draguille.

All these outings, of course, were made in the evenings. During the daylight hours they spent their time exploring districts of the city they had not had time to see when they first came to Paris, and visiting the museums and art galleries.

They made an ascent to the second stage of the Eiffel Tower (they were not allowed any higher as the top platform is now used for television transmission) and ate ices at an airy restaurant high above the windings of the river. They went swimming in the Seine and sailed down the river on a tiny little steam-boat called a *bateau-mouche*, and saw the Renault and Citroën car factories. They stood by the tomb of Napoléon under the dome of Les Invalides (founded as a refuge for the wounded soldiers of the Imperial armies), and admired the frescoes in the Panthéon, the French 'Westminster Abbey'. They strolled from the Île de la Cité down the student-haunted Boulevard Saint Michel, to see the Sorbonne, the seven-hundred-years-old University of Paris, the Jardin du Luxembourg, the Palais du Luxembourg (once a royal residence, now the meeting-place of the French Senate), and the collection of paintings in the Musée du Luxembourg. They wandered the echoing galleries of the Louvre and the green alleys of the Jardin des Plantes. They went shopping with Cécile in the street markets, walking in a mush of trodden fruit and vegetables and in a great din of shouting, along narrow lanes between open-fronted stalls and long lines of carts and barrows piled high with tomatoes, mushrooms, lettuces, and cauliflowers, and past cages where live lobsters raised threatening pincers, and glass cases containing live edible snails. They visited gigantic department stores and shopped fashionably under the arcades of the Rue de Rivoli. Beyond the city they made three memorable excursions. The first, in Jacques's car, was to the Forest of Fontainebleau—where they saw the château and (more interesting to Jean and David) the pretty village of Barbizon where Robert Louis Stevenson, the author of *Treasure Island*, wrote several of his early essays. The

second trip, by train, was to Chartres to see the twelfth-century Gothic Cathedral, an amazing edifice decorated with no less than one thousand eight hundred statuettes.

Of all the churches and cathedrals they had seen in France it was Chartres which impressed our young travellers most. Built on a height and dominating the town and the countryside for miles around, this great grey Gothic cathedral with its green roof and two beautiful spires is one of the most magnificent examples of the art of the Middle Ages which has come down to us. From its wealth of carvings and the scenes depicted on its beautiful stained glass windows (some of which date back to the thirteenth century) it has been described as 'a Bible in stone'. Perhaps the most apt description of it, however, is that by the French author Huysman in his book called *The Cathedral*, in which he speaks of Chartres as 'a forest blooming with roses of fire', and it might, also, be well called 'a garden in stone', for the capitals round the soaring columns and the borders of its many shadowy niches are wreathed with leaves of vine, oak, and ivy, with roses and laurels, strawberries and buttercups, all carved in stone.

Dating mainly from 1260, the present cathedral of Notre Dame de Chartres, old as it is, is only the last of many churches which have stood on the same site, and down in the crypt of the cathedral, where there is another complete church called Notre Dame Sous Terre, the Robertsons were shown a grotto where long before the coming of Christianity the Druids had erected a statue dedicated 'to a virgin who would bear a son'.

'Wouldn't the Druids be amazed if they could come back and see Chartres now,' said Jean in a subdued voice.

'Yes, wouldn't they just!' agreed David.

Finally, and somewhat belatedly, they made a trip to Versailles.

VERSAILLES AND AWAY

As the Versailles trip was a wind-up of their holiday they made it in style, hiring one of the antique open horse carriages for the outward journey and finding this, if the slowest, quite the jolliest way of travelling they had sampled so far.

'And it's particularly appropriate for this trip', observed Jean, as they clip-clopped (for the *n*th time) round the Arc de Triomphe and down the Avenue Foch that morning. 'This must have been how "The Sun King" travelled between Paris and Versailles.'

'Not only Louis XIV but all the other kings and queens', said Mrs Robertson. 'But they didn't come by this route. The royal road between the Louvre and Versailles followed the Seine.'

'Speaking of state carriages', Mr Robertson put in, 'we mustn't forget to see the collection in the courtyard of the Grand Trianon. They have the carriages used by Napoleon I and Napoleon III there and a really magnificent one—the coronation carriage of Charles X. It's a very ornate affair, and weighs nearly seven tons. They say it cost about £40,000 so it must be one of the most expensive coaches ever built.'

'Not so expensive as a Comet though', David said.

Mr Robertson raised his eyebrows. 'That's true!' He laughed. 'Perhaps you're right, David. When you think of some of the machines our modern rulers travel about in, the old Kings and Emperors weren't so extravagant after all.'

'And at least they *looked* decorative', said Jean. 'You don't get much fun hearing a cabinet minister's aeroplane flying past!' At the end of the Avenue Foch they left the city by the Porte Dauphine and, entering the leafy Bois de Boulogne, followed first the Route de Suresnes and then, with the Pavillon Royal on their right, the track by Lac Inférieur (now gay with boating

parties), the waterfall, Lac Supérieur, and the racecourse of Longchamps. Crossing the Seine by the bridge of St Cloud, they reached Versailles, at the Trianon gates, and began their explorations by visiting the Grand Trianon.

The second in size of the three palaces at Versailles, the Grand Trianon, a long, low, pink and white marble building, with all the apartments on the one floor in the Italian style, was built in 1688 by Louis XIV for Madame de Maintenon. In later years it was the home of Louis XV, of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, of Napoleon I and Joséphine, and, later still, of Louis-Philippe, the last of the French kings, who reigned from 1830 to 1848.

After viewing the Salon des Glaces, or Room of Mirrors, where the Councils of Ministers were held when the king was in residence, they were shown through another large apartment containing statues and vases, into the little room which Napoleon occupied, where they saw the Emperor's bed, bath, and writing-table.

'Isn't it plain compared with the rest?' whispered David.

'Yes, Napoleon liked to pretend he was just a simple soldier', replied Mrs Robertson a little acidly. 'But that was probably just an act. He was a great showman, you know.'

'I suppose it *is* almost more ostentatious to live in a palace as if it was a suburban villa than to live in the orthodox palace style', said Jean.

'That's what I've always thought.'

The garden of the Grand Trianon, which was the geometrical sort with barbered hedges, shrubs clipped into most unshrub-like shapes, and regimented flower beds, did not appeal to them, and after they had visited the courtyard and admired the coronation carriage, they made their way next to the white and gold Petit Trianon nearby, a smaller, and Jean thought, much prettier building. Here in its finely proportioned, richly decorated rooms, which were splendidly furnished, Madame du Barry once entertained Louis XV, and Marie Antoinette dressed herself in the clothes of a stage shepherdess before tripping off to her *Hameau* (a little farm by the shores of one of the garden lakes). But they admired Marie Antoinette's garden even more than her house. It was in the English style, well-wooded, full of unexpected flowery

nooks, and with a general air of having happened rather than of having been planned.

Leo, of course, wanted to see the model farm.

'It's just past these trees', his mother told him, and even as she spoke it came into view—a cluster of wooden houses and buildings by the shore of a shining lake.

'Why, it's a proper village!' cried Jean in astonishment.

'Yes, it could easily be lived in', agreed her mother. 'It was a real farm, you know, and the queen and her ladies had real cows and sheep and hens to play with. They even did some real farm work!'

'Like mucking out the byre?' said David, grinning.

Mrs Robertson laughed.

'I doubt if they would have found that poetic. But they certainly made butter. They used to sell the butter and eggs from the *Hameau* for the benefit of the poor of the district. It was just a game, of course.'

It was so pleasant by the shores of the lake that they lazed about there enjoying the sunshine for over an hour, only leaving when they began to feel hungry. They had lunch at one of the restaurants on the square outside the Palace of Versailles proper, a long, yellow, pillared building, glittering with windows, and magnificently situated on a broad terrace above the ornate gardens. The tall houses round the square—La Place d'Armes—looked as old as the Palace.

'We stayed here for two years during the 1914-18 war', said Mrs Robertson. 'I remember it because it had enormous cellars. They made perfect air-raid shelters, but we were rather frightened of them. We never explored all the passages. There seemed no end to them.'

'Perhaps they were secret passages', suggested Leo.

'Quite possibly they were. People liked to be able to come and go unseen at the time when these houses were built.'

A grey-haired ex-soldier, with a deep sonorous voice and an impressive array of medal ribbons, took them round the Palace, prefacing his tour with a brief account of the building's origin and history.

Originally, he informed them, it was one of Louis XIII's hunting châteaux, but it owed its present magnificence to Louis XIV, and, to a lesser extent, to Louis XV. The oldest part of the building was the centre block. Louis XIV added the wings and the chapel, and laid out the garden. Louis XV was responsible for the theatre. Later the Palace was the state residence of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, but since the revolution it had not been used as a royal home for any lengthy period.

'But it has been used quite a lot for other purposes', Mrs Robertson remarked.

'Yes, indeed, Madame', agreed the guide. 'For state balls, receptions, and international conferences, many times. There is no other building to equal it for such purposes near Paris.'

Entering by a doorway next the chapel, they were shown first a vestibule, or hall, which was decorated with a *bas* relief depicting 'Louis XIV crossing the Rhine', and from there, by way of a series of rooms hung with paintings illustrating French history from Charlemagne to Louis XVI, made their way to the pretty theatre, which, the guide told them, was used as a Parliament House by the National Assembly from 1871 to 1875. Next, by way of the richly decorated chapel, with its painted ceiling, its marble and bronze altar, and its Gobelin tapestries, and through more picture and sculpture galleries, they were led to the most impressive room in the palace—the famous Galerie des Glaces, or Hall of Mirrors. This magnificent hall, 230 feet long by 30 feet wide, is lit by seventeen large windows, each faced with a bevelled mirror of the same size. Here, after the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, King William I of Prussia had himself proclaimed Emperor of Germany, and here, on 28th June, 1919, after the defeat of Germany by France and her allies, the Versailles Peace Treaty was signed.

A visit to the Cabinets du Roi (the King's private apartments), including the royal bedchamber where the Sun King died, and to the Queen's bedchamber (where Louis XV and King Philip V of Spain were born) concluded the main part of the tour, and, dismissing their guide with a *pourboire* which made his eyes glisten, they left the Palace and went down into the gardens.

Though the garden of the Palace of Versailles is, like that of

the Grand Trianon, completely formal, it is planned on so vast a scale that its mathematics are evident only from the terrace immediately behind the Palace. Once actually within the maze of paths, lawns, flower beds, artificial waters, and fountain basins—where hundreds of people were wandering without any appearance of crowding—the Robertson youngsters found this vast pleasure ground more varied and beautiful than they had anticipated. Now it was an artfully placed piece of statuary which caught their eye; now a vista across one of the fountain basins or ornamental lakes. Wherever they looked there was harmony and order. Nothing startled, very little surprised, but almost everywhere the scene was pleasing, and the fountains were really beautiful, especially the collection in the Basin of Neptune, the Fountain of Apollo, and Jean's favourite, the Fountain of Latona, which shows the goddess transforming Lycian peasants into frogs as a punishment for having refused her a drink of water.

It was very late when they left the garden, and the Place d'Armes which had been so busy earlier in the day was almost empty of traffic.

'No horse carriages this time!' said Jean, regretfully, then, 'Oh yes, there's one!'

'Run over and see if he's free, David', said Mr Robertson.

The coachman was lighting his carriage lamps to save a halt on his way back to Paris. He was disengaged. They clambered aboard and relaxed against the musty cushions.

'It's a perfect end to a perfect day', sighed Jean happily, as they clopped once again through the aisles of the Bois.

'We're not going home yet', said her mother, mischievously.

'Oh?'

'We're going to one of the forest restaurants', Mr Robertson explained. He tried to look innocent. 'I thought, since it's our last night, we might have a little snack out-of-doors.'

Soon a flashing of lights showed through the trees, and a few minutes later they drew up at the entrance to the restaurant garden. On their right the lights of the building shone out on flowering shrubs and beds of flowers. A waiter, his shirt-front looming up ghost-like through the dusk, approached them.

'Oui, Monsieur?'

Mr Robertson gave his name.

'Ah oui, Monsieur. Je comprends! This way please.'

Leading them past the restaurant he bowed them through a rustic arch into a bower loaded with shrubs and trees, floored with grass, and lit by coloured lights strung between the boughs of the surrounding trees. In the centre of the arbour stood a table glittering with glasses and cutlery and round the table, much amused at David, Jean, and Leo's amazed faces, sat Madame Draguille, Cécile, Jacques, Pierre, Jacqueline, Yseult, and Michel!

When Jean recalled that 'snack' in the Bois de Boulogne in later days, it always seemed to her that it belonged more to the world of dreams than of reality. Undoubtedly there was magic in the Bois that night, if it was only the human magic of joy and friendship. The soft white moths that came fluttering about the lights were no ordinary moths. The leaf shadows on the gleaming white table-cloth made no casual patterns. The music drifting out to them from the gay restaurant was no common music. The waiters swooping in and out of the shadows with piled plates and gigantic platters possessed at least the secrets of apparition and invisibility. And what a banquet they served!

The menu contained dishes from every part of the country the Robertsons had visited in their combined travels and from many other regions besides. There were delicatessen from Alsace and cheese from Savoy and the Alps. There were olives and almonds from Provence, trout from Auvergne and vegetables from Brittany. There were pale golden Bordeaux, ruby claret, and frothing champagne; cider from Brittany and fruit syrups from Touraine. There was even, presented before Leo by its proud architect, a little black-eyed, red-cheeked gnome of a man in a white apron and a huge chef's hat, a model in sweetmeats of the Arc de Triomphe set on an ice-cream Étoile!

This last was almost too much for Leo.

He gave a gasp and stared with such enormous eyes that Jacques thought he must have swallowed a bone and gave him such a hearty whack on the back to dislodge it that Leo sprawled

VERSAILLES AND AWAY

forwards across the table and, to his horror (and everyone else's merriment), buried his nose in the *pièce montée*!

It was a glorious end to their long holiday, but this time it really was the end.

Next day they left Paris from the Gare St Lazare for Le Havre, the home base, at the mouth of the Seine, for French transatlantic liners sailing to New York and Quebec, and the channel port for the crossing to Southampton.

There was no snow now on the farm lands of Normandy. Instead the sun shone on lush green meadows and fields where the corn was already tall. In the orchards green apples danced on a million boughs. Peasants in the fields wore sun-bonnets and straw hats. The cattle in the meadows swished their tails to drive off the flies.

They saw the sun set over Rouen, the war-shattered cathedral town where Jeanne d'Arc was martyred. When they reached Le Havre there were lights in the windows of the town and at the mastheads of the ships, and these lights were the last they saw of France.

David and Jean stood by the rail watching them sink into the waves as the churning propellers drove the ship through the night towards England. There were few other passengers on deck and none near them. A lighthouse beam flashed to star-board.

'That's the light on the point', said David.

Jean nodded. She had a lump in her throat and was afraid her voice would betray her if she spoke.

'What surprised me', went on David, reflectively, 'was that it was so *varied*. Wish I could have gone right up Mont Blanc though!'

'Wish we were back at Les Olives', said Jean, huskily.

In a brightly-lit corner of her mind she could see the splashing fountain in the *place* of Fayence and the changing light on the leaves of the olive-trees, now dark, now silver, as the breeze blew.

There was a clatter of footsteps behind them, and Leo appeared.

'Aren't you coming downstairs?' he asked.

'We're watching the lights'.

'Oh!' Leo joined them at the rail.

THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN FRANCE

The lights of Le Havre were very distant now. Only the flash of the lighthouse was still bright.

'You sorry it's over, Leo?' asked David.

Leo nodded. 'Yes. It's a spiffing country, isn't it?' His eyes grew dreamy and he drew a long breath. 'And wasn't that a splendigorous feed we had last night!' he sighed, happily.

INDEX AND PRONUNCIATIONS

a as in <i>bat</i>	ā as in <i>bate</i>	â as in <i>calm</i>	à as in <i>aunt</i> (pronounced very shortly)
e as in <i>bet</i>	ē as in <i>beat</i>	ê as in <i>her</i>	é—a sound between e and ê, like é in the French <i>école</i>
i as in <i>bit</i>	î as in <i>bite</i>		
o as in <i>cot</i>	ō a little longer than in <i>cot</i> but not as long as in <i>coat</i>		
oo as in <i>soot</i>	ōō as in <i>coo</i>	ü, u with rounded lips	
g as in <i>gold</i>	zh, a soft sound very much like that in <i>pleasure</i> , and as in French <i>bonjour</i>		
<i>an, en, in, on, un</i> , French nasalized <i>n</i> .			

If one syllable is to be stressed more than another it is followed by '. Two syllables that are to be slurred and pronounced almost as one are not separated by a hyphen; thus, *diè*, *zhüè-yä*.

Note: It is not always possible to write in English the equivalent of the *exact* sounds of foreign words. You should regard the pronunciations given here as a guide which will enable you to get reasonably close to the versions generally considered to be correct.

AGRICULTURE, *see* Farms
 Aiguilles Rouges (e-gwëyé rôôzh), 90
 Albert I, Prince, 87
 Albertville (äl-bär-vil), 89
 Allier (a-lë-é), River, 18
 Alps, 15, 24, 35, 57, 82, 89-114, 120, 139, 151
 Alsace (äl-zas), 130-9
 Altitude, effects of, 106-8
 Angers (*an-zhé*), 124
 Angling, 117, 122
 Antibes (*antëb*), Rue d', 77, 82
 Arc de Triomphe (ark dë trë'ôn'), 17-20, 28, 32, 142, 145, 150
 Arcades, 25, 119
 Architecture, 26-7, 32-3, 35-6, 61-2, 97, 118, 124, 127-8, 131, 132, 146, 147, 148
 Arles (ärl), 43
 Armes, Place d' (ärm, pläs d'), 147
 Art collections, 25, 38, 143, 148
 Artists, 13, 36, 87

Arve, River (ärv), 90, 91
 Astronomical clock (Strasbourg), 133
 Authors, 29, 36, 40, 46, 125, 132, 135, 142
 Auto-rail (öt-ö-rîyé), 61, 67
 Auvergne (ö-vernyé), 116-19
 Avignon (ä-vë-nyon), 43
 BAKERS, 12, 19, 62
 Ballet, 142
 Balmat, Jacques (bal-ma, zhäk), Alpine guide, 93
 Balthazar (bal-ta-zär), 43
 Balzac, Honoré de (bal-zac, on'ö-ré) (1799-1850), 123, 124
 Barbizon (bar-bë-zon), 143
 Barry, Madame du, 146
 Bastille, Place de la (bas-tëyé pläs dë lä), 142
 Bathing, 15, 3., 46, 50, 77-8, 87, 143
 Batignolles (ba-të-nyol), 35
 Baux, Les (bö, lé), 43

- Beaulieu (bō-liè), 43, 84
 Bees, 57, 101, 122
 Birds, 56, 139
 Biscay, Bay of, 120
 Black Forest, 134
 Blizzards, 91
 Bluebeard's Castle, 124-5
 Boating, pleasure, 34, 145-6
 Bohemian life, 36
 Bordeaux (bor-dō), 130
 Bossons, Les (bo-son, lé), 108-9
 Bossons, Glacier des, 24, 90, 97-9, 110
 Boulogne, Bois de (bōō-lōnyè, bwà dè) park, 25, 33-4, 145-6, 149-51
 Brévent, Mont (brè-ven', mon), 90, 96, 99, 115, 134
 Brie, La (brè, là), 140
 Brion, Frederica (brè-on, frè-dér-è-ka), 135
 Brion, Pastor, 142
 Brittany, 44, 92, 114, 115, 120, 125-8
 Broglie, Place (brèyè, plàs), 131
 Buis (büè), a shrub, 79
 Bull-fighting, 41
 Buses, 19, 24, 52, 75, 82
 CACTUS, 70, 86
 Cafés, 12, 36, 69, 80, 81, 84, 101, 128, 140
 Calvaries, 126
 Camargue (kà-màrg), 41
 Canals, 134, 139
 Cannes (kan), 66, 75-83
 Cap Ferrat (kap fer-rà), 84
 Casinos, 13, 70, 82, 85-6
 Catacombs, 27
 Cathedrals, 26-7, 75, 118, 121, 123, 124, 125, 131, 132-6, 144, 151
 Cattle, 41, 99, 106, 117, 122
 Caves, 43, 120
 Celtic Crosses, 126
 Celts, 44, 116-17, 126, 132
 Chalets (sha-lè), 97, 99, 106, 116
 Chambord (shan-bor), 124
 Chamonix (sha-mo-nè), Town, 91, 100
 Chamonix, Vale of, 90-114, 139
 Champagne (shan-pa-nyè), 107, 140
 Champs-Élysées (shan-zé-lè-zé), 23, 24-5, 32, 35
 Champocé Castle (shan-tō-sé), 125
 Charlemagne (shar-lè-ma'nyè), 148
 Charles X, 145
 Chartres Cathedral (shàr-tr), 144
 Châteaux (sha-tō), 63, 113, 115, 121, 123-4, 143, 148
 Children, 14, 24, 31-2, 34, 39, 50, 62, 75, 78-9, 110
 Christmas, 44
 Cicadas (sè-ka-das), 63
 Cinema, 141-2
 Citroën Works (sè-trō-en), 143
 Clair, René (klār, re'né), 142
 Clermont-Ferrand (kler-mon-fer-an), 118
 Clichy, Place (klè-shè, plàs), 35
 Clothing, 11, 12, 14, 34, 38, 48, 52, 62, 75, 78, 80, 84, 100, 119, 125, 126, 133, 140
 Coal-mining, 89, 109, 140
 Comédie Française (ko-mé-dè fran-sàz), 142
 Concierge (kon-sè-erzh), 16, 18-19
 Conciergerie (kon-sè-er-zhè-rè), 36
 Concorde, Place de la (kon-kord, plàs dè là), 24-5, 142
 Condamine (kon-da-mèn), 84
 Constantin Pecqueur, Place (kon-stan-tin pe-kèr, plàs), 36
 Convents, 33
 Corsica, 83
 Cotton mills, 137
 Courcelles, Boulevard de (kōōr-sel', bōōl-vàr dè), 35
 Cowboys, 41
 Creusot, Le (krè-zō, lè), 118
 Crofts, 126
 Custom-houses, 13-14, 137
 DASPODIUS (das-pō-dè'üs), clockmaker, 133
 Daudet, Alphonse (dō-dé al-fons), (1840-97), 40
 Dauphine, Porte (dō-fin, port), 145
 Denfert-Rochereau, Place (den'fer-rosh'rō, plàs), 27
 Dent du Midi (den dü mè-dè), 24, 91, 99, 100
 Department stores, 143
 Descartes, René (dé-kart re-né), (1596-1650), (philosopher), 123
 Dieppe (dè-ep'), 11-14
 Dijon (dè-zhon'), 118
 Docks, 11, 45, 83, 84, 137, 151
 Draguignan (dra-gè-nyan'), 61
 Druids, 127, 128
 Dumas, Alexandre (dū-má, à-lex-andr) (1802-70), 46

EDUCATION, 29-33
 Eiffel Tower, 36, 143
 Electricity, 59-60, 89-90
 Esterel Range (es-té-rel), 80
 Étoile (é-wál), 19-21, 27, 150

FAMILY ALLOWANCES, 110
 Family relations, 22, 29, 31-2
 Farms, 14, 15, 39, 42, 52, 53-60, 63, 70, 99, 117, 122, 126, 130, 131, 135, 139, 140, 147, 151
 Faust (fowst), 135, 142
 Fayence (fa-yens), 52-3, 61-3, 121
 Fêtes (fet), 126, 142
 Films, 142
 Fish, 46, 84, 87-8, 117, 122, 126, 150
 Fishing, sea, 46, 76, 84, 126
 Fleet, Mediterranean, 39, 44
 Floods, 63
 Flowers, 15, 19, 39, 43, 48, 56, 62, 65, 68, 71-2, 73, 77, 82, 86, 101, 122, 149
 Foch, Avenue, 32, 145
 Foire aux Crêtes (fwär ö krööt), 'Pot-boiler' fair, 36
 Fontainebleau (fon-ten-blö), 142
 Food, 14, 17, 19, 22, 29, 46, 49, 54, 61, 82, 93, 101, 108, 127, 128, 136, 150-1
 Forests, 33-4, 52, 67, 90, 95, 97, 105, 116, 117, 122, 130, 134, 143, 145, 149-51
 Formal gardens, 25, 146, 148-9
 Fourviers, La Colline de (föör-vē-är, là ko-lèn dè), 116
 Franco-Prussian War, 132, 148
 Franks, 132
 Fréjus (fré-zhüs), 15, 50, 52
 Frontiers, 93, 120, 130, 137, 138, 140
 Fruit, 14, 15, 42-3, 46, 47, 54-5, 65, 69, 78, 79, 80, 95, 119, 122, 139, 150, 151
 Fuel, 53, 89, 97, 117
 Funfairs, 29, 142
 Furniture, 16, 127, 131, 136, 146, 148

GARE CENTRALE (gar sen-tral'), 130
 Gare de l'Est (gar dè lest), 27
 Gare de Lyon (gar dè lē-on), 38
 Gare Saint-Lazare (gar sin la-zär') 151
 Garlic, 39, 72-3
 Gautier, Théophile (gö-ti-é téo-fél), (1811-72), 36

Geese, 122
 Germans, 132, 137, 138, 148
 Germany, 137-8, 140, 148
 Girl Guides, 32
 Goats, 52, 57, 99, 101
 Goethe, Wolfgang (gè-tè, volf'gang), (1749-1832), 135
 Grand Palais (gran pa-lä), 25
 Grand Trianon (gran trē-an-on), 146
 Grasse (gräs), 39, 66, 68-75
 Grasse Cathedral, 75
 Grenoble (gre-nobl'), 89, 116
 Grenoble University, 89
 Guignol (gè-nyol), 24
 Gutenberg, Johannes (gü-ten-berg), German printer (1397-1468), 135

HAUT-BAR (ö-bar), 134
 Havre, Le (ävr, lè), 151
 Henry IV, 121
 Hotels, 49, 68, 78, 82, 90, 100, 112, 118
 Houches, Les (öosh, lèz), 103
 Hugo (ü'gö), Victor (1802-1885), 132
 Hunting, 122-3

ILE DE LA CITÉ (èl dè là cè'té), 26-7, 143
 Ile de Sein (èl dè sèn), 127
 Ill, River (èl), 131, 135
 Industries, 40, 45, 69-73, 109, 116, 118, 119, 137, 140, 142, 143
 Inférieur, Lac (in-fè-rè-ër), 33, 34, 145
 Invalides, Les (in-va-lèd, lèz), 143
 Irrigation, 59
 Isère, River (èz-är), 89
 Italian immigrants, 109

JARDIN DES PLANTES (zhar'din dé plant), 143
 Jeanne d'Arc (zhan dârk), 121, 151
 Joséphine, Empress (zhö-zé-fèn), 146
 Jura mountains, 130

KEHL (kél), 137
 King René's Castle, 124
 Kléber, General (klé-ber), 135

LACE, 119
 Land-hunger, 60
 Languages, 44, 109, 117, 132
 Laval, Gilles de, (la-val, zhèl dè), 125
 Léman, Lac (lē-man), 91
 Lérins, Îles des (lé-rin, èl dé), 80, 81, 82
 Lighthouses, 44, 151-2

'Little Africa', 43
 Loire, River (lwar), 121, 123
 Longchamps racecourse (lon'shan), 146
 Lorraine, 139
 Lorraine, Dukes of, 139
 Lorraine iron deposits, 140
 Loti, Pierre (lō-te, pē-er') (1850-1923), 36
 Louis XIII (lōd-ē), 87, 148
 Louis XIV, 82, 145, 146, 148
 Louis XV, 87, 139, 146, 148
 Louis XVI, 146, 148
 Louis-Philippe (lōd-ē fē-lēp), 146
 Louvre, Le (lōōvr, lē), 25, 143, 145
 Luxembourg Museum, 143
 Luxembourg Palace and gardens, 143
 Lycée Janson de Sailly (lē-sé zhan-son dē sa-yē), 30
 Lycée Molière (lē-sé mol-ē-er), 30
 Lyons, 40, 42, 116

MAINTENON, Madame de (min-tē-non), 146
Malade Imaginaire, Le (ma-lād' i-mazh-ēn-ār, lē), 142
 Man in the Iron Mask, 82
 Maquis (ma'kē), 29
 Marianne (ma-rē-an'), 15, 17
 Marie-Antoinette (ma-rē' an-twä-net), 26, 146
 Markets, 17, 82, 143
 Marne, La (mārn), 139
 Marseillaise, La (mar-se-yez' lā), 132
 Marseilles (mar-seyē), 40, 42, 43, 44-6
 Marshes, 41
 Massif Central (ma-sēf' sen-tral'), 90, 113, 117, 120
 Meadows, 14, 97, 101, 122, 151
 Mediterranean Sea, 39, 44-51, 70
 Mentone (men-ton), 77-88
 Mer de Glace (mer dē glās), 90, 114
 Métro, Le (mé-trō, lē), tube railway, 19, 21, 25, 27-8
 Michelin factories, 118
 Mineral springs, 118-19
 Mirrors, Gallery of, 148
 Mirrors, Room of, 146
 Mist, 67-9
 Model farm, 14
 Molière (mol-ē-er) (1622-73), 142
 Monaco (mon-ā'kō), 82, 84-8
 Monasteries, 82, 127
 Monks, 80, 125, 128

Mont Blanc (*mon blan*), 24, 90-100, 103-8, 110, 132
 Monte Carlo (mon-té kar'lō), 82-3, 84, 85-7
 Monte Cristo, Count of, 46
 Montmartre (*mon-mar'tr*), 35-6
 Mont Saint-Michel (*mon san mē-shel'*), 127-8
 Moorlands, 125
 Moulins (mōō-lin), 121
 Mountain Railways, 89, 106-7, 114
 Mountaineering, 24, 92-3, 95-9, 100, 103-8, 110
 Mountains (*see* Alps, Jura, Massif Central, Pyrénées, Vosges), 120
 Mulhouse (mū-lōōz), 137
 Museums, 25, 87-8, 143
My Brother Jack, 40

NANCY (*nan-sē*), 139
 Napoléon I (na-pō-lé-on), 50, 69, 83, 143, 146
 Napoléon III, 145
 Nation, Place de la (na-syon, plās dē lā), 27
 National Assembly, 148
 Nevers (nē-vār'), 121
 Nice (nēs), 43, 82, 83, 84
 Normandy, 11-14, 127, 151
 Normans, 11
 Notre Dame de la Garde (no'trē dām dē lā gārd), 44-5
 Notre Dame de Paris (no'trē dām dē pa-rē'), 26-8
 Nuns, 125

OCEANOGRAPHIC MUSEUM, 87-8
 Odéon Theatre (ō-dé-on), 143
 Oil wells, 137
 Old people, 109
 Olive oil, 54, 83
 Olive trees, 42, 53, 54
 Opéra (ō-pé-rā), opera house, 140, 142, 143
 Opéra-Comique (ō-pé-rā ko-mēk'), 143
 Orchards, 14, 122, 139, 151

PALM SUNDAY, 78-9
 Pantheon (*pan-tē-on*), 36, 143
 Parc Monceau (park mon-sō), 35
 Parents, 28, 31-2, 39
 Parfumeries (par-fū-mē-rē), 68, 69, 70-4

Paris, 15-38, 39, 121, 128, 140-3, 145-6, 149-51
 Paris, University of, 143
 Pasteur, Louis (pas-tér) (1822-95), 135 •
 Peasants, 59, 101-3, 121, 126
 Pechelbronn (pe-kel-bron), 137
 Pennine Alps, 90
 Pensions (pen-syon), 77
 Perrault, Charles (pe-rô, sharl) (1628-1703), 63
 Petite France (pe-têt frans), 131, 139
 Petit Palais (pe-tê pa-lâ'), 25
 Philosophy, 29, 123
 Phocceans, 44
 Pigalle, Place (pê-gal plâs), 36
 Pigs, 117, 122-3
 Pilgrims, 128
 Plessis-les-Tours (p'le-sê-lé-tôör), 123
 Pont Neuf (pon néf), 25
 Pope's Palace, 43
 Porphyry, 43, 80
 Porte du Croux (port dü krôö), 121
 Porters, 11, 75
 Port-Royal, 37
 Potash, 137
 Pottery, 121
 Poultry-farming, 53
 Provence (pro-vens), 39, 40, 42-88
 Punch and Judy, 24
 Puys (püë) hills, 117
 Pyrénées (pê-ré-né), 90, 120

 QUATORZE JUILLET (ka-torz' zhüë-yâ), 142
 Québec (ké-bek), 151

 RABFLAIS, FRANÇOIS (rab-lâ, fron-swâ), (c. 1490-1553), 123
 Race courses, 82, 146
 Railways, 13-14, 15, 38, 41, 89, 107, 114, 130, 139, 151
 Regional costumes, 119, 125, 126
 Religion, 78-9, 126, 128
 Renault (rên-ô) Car Factory, 143
 Rennes (ren), 125
 Restaurants, 48, 82, 106, 136, 143, 147, 149-50
 Revolution, 26, 135, 148
 Rhine (rîn), River, 134, 137-8, 148
 Rhône, (rôn), River, 40, 43, 52, 90
 Riou Blanc (rê-ôô blan), 58
 Riviera (rê-vê-er-â), 15, 37, 46-51, 75-88

Rivoli, Rue de (ri-vô-lê, rû dê), 143
 Rodéos, 41
 Rohan, Palais de (rô-an, pa-lâ dê), 131
 Romans, 40, 43, 50, 52, 85
 Rond-Point (ron pwon), 24
 Rouen (rôö-en), 15
 Rouget de Lisle (rôö-zhé dê lêl), composer, 132
 Route Napoléon (rôöt na-pô-lé-on), 69, 70

 SACRÉ COEUR (sa-kré kër), 35
 Sailors, 39, 44
 St Cloud (sin klôö) district, 146
 St Étienne (sint ét-ê-en), 118
 St Gervais-les-Bains (sin zhër-ve lé bin), 89
 St Honorat, Ile (sin-on-o-râ), 81, 82
 St Jean Cap Ferrat (sin zhon kap fer-râ), 84
 St Lazare, Gare (sin la-zâr), 151
 St Malo (sin ma-lô), 125, 127
 St Michel, (sin mê-shel), Boulevard, 143
 St Paul (sin pôl), 61
 St Pierre-le-Moutiers (sin pê-âr' lê môö-tê-é), 121
 St Raphael (sin ra-fâ-el), 39, 48-52, 60
 Sainte-Chapelle (sint sha-pel'), 27
 Ste Marguerite, Ile (sint mar-ge-rêt), 81, 82
 Sanatoria, 106
 Sanitation, 59
 Saône (sôn), River, 116
 Sardine fishing, 46, 84
 Schools, 23, 30-3
 Scouting, 32
 Seine (sân), River, 25-6, 36, 145, 146, 151
 Sélestat (sé-les-tâ), 139
 Senate, 143
 Servants, 17
 Sesenheim (sâ-zen-him), 130, 135, 142
 Sheep, 52, 117
 Shell fish, 122, 127, 143
 Shipping, 40, 45, 83, 137, 151
 Shopping, 12, 19, 24, 38, 61, 82, 100, 143
 Silk weaving, 40, '6
 Social services, 109
 Sorbonne (sor-bon) University, 143
 Spas, 89, 118

Spring, 39, 65, 95
 Stanislas, King, 139
 Steel-making, 118, 140
 Stevenson, Robert Louis, 143
 Storks, 139
 Strasbourg (stras-böör), 92, 112, 128, 130-7
 Strasbourg University, 135
 Street vendors, 19, 20, 140, 143
 Sunday, 34, 78-9
 'Sun King' (see Louis XIV)
 Supérieur, Lac (su-pé-rê-ër), 33, 146
 Suresnes (sü-rän), Route de, 145

TAPESTRIES, 124
 Tea-drinking, 101
 Téléfériques (té-lé-fé-rêk), 96-7, 99, 103-6, 108, 134
 Television, 143
 Terraced fields, 57-8
 Theatres, 43, 118, 142, 143, 148
 Toul (tööl), 139
 Toulon (töö-lon), 39
 Touraine (töö-rän), 92, 114, 122-4, 126
 Tourette (töö-ret), 63
 Tours (töör), 115, 122, 123, 124
 Trade, 45, 83
 Traffic, 20, 33, 140
 Trees, 14, 19, 42, 43, 46, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 60, 65, 77, 79-80, 82, 117

Tuileries, Les (tüë-lé-rê-lé), Palace and Garden, 25
 Turquières (tür-kê-är), Les, 63

UNIVERSITIES, 89, 135, 143

VALENCE (va-lens), 42
 Var (vár), 48-67, 139, 151
 Vegetables, 126, 143
 Versailles (ver-sí), 38, 144-9
 Vichy (vê-shê), 90, 92, 116-17, 118-19, 121
 Vichy water, 14, 116
 Villefranche (vêl fransh), 84
 Vinery, 62
 Vines, 42, 65, 122, 139, 140
 Volcanoes, 117, 120
 Vosges (vözh), 15, 130, 134, 139

WAR, 29, 84, 116-17, 132, 138, 147, 148, 151
 Washerwomen, 62
 Wells, 59, 63
 Wheat, 122, 140
 William the Conqueror, 128
 Wine, 14, 29, 48-9, 54, 62, 136, 140, 150

YOUTH HOSTELS, 32, 100
 'Yseult' legend, 91

GLOSSARY

AIGUILLE (e-gwēyè) needle—used here of rock pinnacle
 Asperges (as-perzh), asparagus—slang for tall, thin people
 Attention! (at-ten-syon), pay attention!
 Auvergnats (ô-ver-nyâ), people from Auvergne
 A votre service (à votr ser-vès), at your service

Bateau-mouche (ba-tô-möösh), Seine steamboat
 Biniou (bê-nê-ôô) Breton bagpipe
 Bistro (bês-trô), a small café—rather slangish
 Bonne chère (bon shâr), 'good cheer' or excellent food
 Bouillabaisse (böô-yâ-bâz), fish soup

Café chantant (ka-fé shan'tan), café with music
 Café-filtre (ka-fé-filtr), coffee filtered directly into the cup
 Café-tabac (ka-fé-ta-bâ'), café and tobacconist
 Caporal (ka-por-al), cheap French cigarettes
 Cécile (sês-êl'), girl's name
 C'est la France (sâ lâ frans), that's how it is in France
 Chef-lieu (shêf-liê), administrative town of département—roughly the county capital

Citroën (sə-trō-en), popular French make of car
Collège (kol-ezh), college or high school
Comme vous voulez! (kom vōō vōō-lā), as you will!
Complètement (kon-plet-é-men), completely
Confiserie (kon-fēz-rē), confectioner
Crêpe dentelles (krep den-tel'), very thin Breton pancakes

Département (dé-par-tē-men), administrative area—corresponds roughly to
English county
Dieu nous préserve! (diē nōō pré-zerv), God preserve us!

École communale (é-kol ko-mün-al), State primary school
École d'Escalade (des-ka-lād), school for climbing
En famille (en fam-ēyè), with the family
Épicier (é-pē-sē-é), grocer

Faïence (fa-yens), pottery ware
Flûte (flüt), long thin loaf of bread
Fou, folle, foux (fōō, fol, fōō), mad

Georges (zhorzh), boy's name

Hansi (han-zē), Alsatian boy's name
Henri (on-rē), boy's name
Hôtel de Ville (ō-tel dé vil), the town hall

Jacqueline (zhak-lēn), girl's name

Les Célestins (lé sél-es-tin), mineral spring at Vichy
Lycée (lē-sé), high school

Maman (ma-man), Mummy
Michel (mē-shel), boy's name
Mistral (mēs-tral), a cold wind from the mountains
Mon vieux (mon viē), literally 'my old'—roughly 'old chap'

Nègre en chemise (nāgr en she-mēz), a sweet of chocolate, cream and custard

Oncle (onkl), uncle

Paroisse (par-was), parish
Pension (pen-syon), boarding house
Petit beurre (pe-tē bér), popular biscuit, rather like 'rich tea'
Petit déjeuner (pe-tē dé-zhē-né), breakfast
Petit pois (pe-tē pwā), small green peas
Pierre (pē-er), boy's name
Place (plās), place, open space, square
Portus Herculis Monaeci (por'tōōs her-ku-lēs mon-a-kē), Roman name for
Monaco
Pourboire (pōōr-bwār), a tip
Puits (püē), mountains in the Massif Central

Rameau (ra-mō), decorated sweetmeats carried on Palm Sunday
Rapide (ra-péd), express train
Rebel (rè-bel), surname
Renault (rèn-ō), popular French make of car
Rosé (rō-zé), rose-coloured wine of South France

Sabot (sa-bō), wooden shoe
Saucisson (sō-sē-son), a cooked sausage
Stoecklin (stēk-līn), Alsatian surname

Téléférique (té-lé-fé-rēk), cable railway
Toinon (twā-non), girl's name
Tourangeaux (tōō-ran-zhō), natives of Touraine
Trottoir (trot-wār), pavement

Un pays de blé et de vin (un pāē dé blé é dé vin), a land of wheat and of wine

Vichy (vē-shé) water, a mineral water from Vichy
Vin du pays (vin dü pāē), local wine